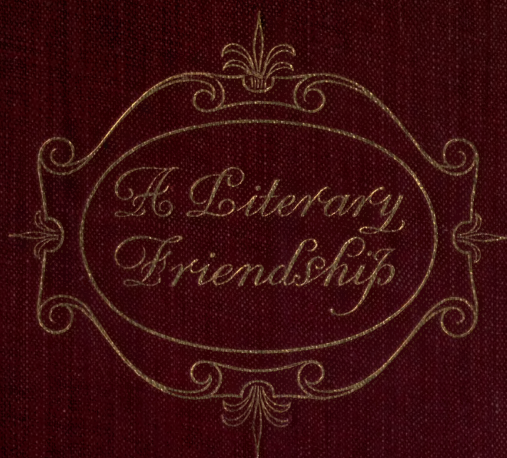


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A LITERARY FRIENDSHIP

A LITERARY FRIENDSHIP

LETTERS TO LADY ALWYNE COMPTON

1869—1881

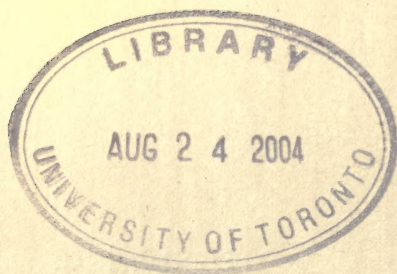
FROM THOMAS WESTWOOD

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1914

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PREFACE

"He who knows what sweets and virtues are in . . . the ground, the waters, the plants, the heavens, and how to come at these enchantments . . . is the rich and royal man."—EMERSON.

THESE words of Emerson's describe Mr. Westwood. I made his acquaintance, by letter, about forty years ago, through a friend living near him at Boitsfort, then a quiet village, near Brussels.

We began a correspondence, and two or three years later he came to London with his wife, a charming Belgian lady, still delightful to young and old, in spite of advancing years. I do not remember having seen him again in England, but after 1877 we paid several visits to Boitsfort.

Such letters, in his faultless foreign writing, could not be torn up, so they remained in their box for more than thirty years—and might have reposed there still, but that they were seen by Miss Soulsby, and she at once suggested that they should be published.

I hesitated, thinking that no one in these rushing days would care to read them. But she thought that the charm of his writing, the variety of his interests, his just and delicate criticisms, would still be valued, and so the little book is launched on the wide sea.

It was said of Sir Walter Scott that he inspired and enlivened every one who came within his reach, and it was the same with Mr. Westwood, whose stimulating influence may be felt in his letters. His descriptions of Brussels then—the quiet, old-fashioned town, compared with the Brussels of to-day—marks the difference of the world in which they were written. But it is the same everywhere: *Sic transit pax mundi*.

I wish to thank both Miss Soulsby and Miss Louisa Hamilton Gordon for their invaluable help in preparing the letters for press.

I should like also, if I may, to express my gratitude to Mr. Murray for his kindness and patience with my age and inexperience.

FLORENCE, LADY ALWYNE COMPTON.

THE INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR OF MR. WESTWOOD BY HIS WIFE

I HAVE been asked by friends who kindly wish to see some of Thomas Westwood's letters brought into notice to write a little memoir of my husband—in appearance an easy task, but in reality a rather difficult one, however dear to my heart, for so aged a widow and a foreigner.

My husband's life was uneventful, made interesting by his correspondence with so many eminent writers of his day. He came to Brussels at the age of thirty, appointed there, as Secretary and afterwards Director, to an Anglo-Belgian railway company. He died in the year 1888, on March 13, at the age of seventy-two, in Brussels, Boulevard Waterloo, where we had taken a house for the winter months, thinking that town would be more cheerful, in his invalid state, than our country residence.

He had a large, intellectual mind ; politics, business, and money-making had no attractions for him. He was considered a clever critic, never a harsh one. His temper was always serene. He had a smile of his own, humorous and sweet in expression ; his foreign friends had called it *le sourire de Westwood*. He was devoted to children, whom he greatly attracted, telling them fairytales and amusing stories ; and many have been the tiny girls who sat on his knee and flirted with him. He called them his " little sweethearts," and they called him " Uncle Tom." To the lads he taught the art of making " flies " and " minnows," and gave them the love of fishing. Many are now the fathers and mothers of families, in distant lands, who still remember those happy hours spent with their old friend in his pretty home of the " Gulden Berg." He had a passionate love of fishing, as he proved by his poems on Izaak Walton. For many years he owned twelve miles of fishing in the Belgian Ardennes, in a stream called the Bocq, which falls into the Meuse ; and some of the happiest recollections of my past life are those hours we spent together in the lovely

resorts of the Bocq and the Meuse, with fishing-rod and books for hours of repose. The green, secluded valleys, the bright stream alive with trout, the grey rocks emerging out of the water—all was exquisitely picturesque and charming. At night we returned to sleep in some small farm-house, in a remote village of the Ardennes, where the inhabitants were all hospitality and primitiveness.

My husband had the rare privilege of knowing Charles Lamb when a child, living next door to him at The Chase, Enfield, and of being taken into favour by him. Charles Lamb gave him his first Latin lessons, making them most interesting, and allowed him the free use of his library. Though Mr. Westwood was but a small lad at the time, he fully appreciated this privilege, and he greatly enjoyed his days spent amongst those volumes, his youthful mind grasping their varied contents in a rather surprising manner, which pleased Lamb. He often told me how he used to sit unnoticed under Lamb's table till a late hour in the night, afraid of moving or making a sound lest he

should be sent to bed, listening eagerly to the talk of Lamb and his illustrious friends, all those men of genius who assembled nightly in his house.

I have now in my possession a pretty, framed pastel portrait of Charles Lamb's school-mistress, Mrs. Reynolds, who was considered a beauty in her day, and which he gave to my husband as a parting souvenir when he left Enfield ; also two silver candlesticks, presented by Mary Lamb to my husband's mother (Mary Westwood) in acknowledgment of the care Mrs. Westwood took of her beloved brother during her sequestration. My husband was only eighteen when Lamb died, but in some almost impalpable manner that great man, for whom he had so much reverence and love, left on his manner of thought, and his character, a trace all through his life.

One of the greatest joys of T. Westwood's life was his long and intimate correspondence with Mrs. Barrett Browning, before and after her marriage. All her charming answers to those letters are in my hands. Also amongst his interesting friends and correspondents

was the queenly Mrs. Cameron, Lord Tennyson's friend and neighbour, of the Isle of Wight. She sent him a portfolio of her then celebrated photographs, begging him to keep those he liked best, and to offer the others, in her usual generous manner, to any poor gentle-folks with artistic tastes for the ornamentation of their homes. My husband exhibited the photographs in a *salon artistique* in Brussels, where they were greatly admired.

My husband's correspondence with literary men and women of the day was too voluminous for quotation.

I will now close this little notice, fearing it will offer but small interest to the readers.

My husband was modest, charitable, retiring. We lived together, never parting, for thirty-two ideal years, he making life beautiful for me and for many around him.

ROSA WESTWOOD.

A LITERARY FRIENDSHIP

I

November 21, 1869.

DEAR MADAM,

I thank you much for the kindness of your note, and for your indulgent reception of my book. It shrank a little from presenting itself, I assure you, feeling as if it had come out of Sleepy Hollow, and had found nobody to own it—not even its writer.

It is quite true, however (and this was its sole excuse for seeking you), that it was the starting-point of my acquaintance with M. B. She and I had been fellow-contributors to the *Athenæum*, had been reviewed in the same article in that journal, and been about equal sharers in the administration, not to say damnation, of faint praise accorded us. So after the chill touch of the critic's finger-tips we turned, naturally enough,

to each other, exchanged books and a more hearty handshaking, and began a friendship that has never once known check or cloud.

I had two friends at that period in similar case—the other was Mrs. Browning. Both were prisoners within four walls from motives of health ; both escaped into freer life by the door of marriage ; and both sought refuge in Italy from the rashness of their act. . . .

Need I say how gladly I should avail myself of the honour you propose, of making your personal acquaintance ? And, indeed, I hope to do so. I am not weaned from England, but my household gods are set up here, and as Lamb says of them, they “ plant a terribly fixed foot.” I came to Brussels twenty years ago, with an appointment that I believed would be of the briefest, and it holds me still—to say nothing of other and nearer appointments that have come to me in the meantime.

But perhaps you will be passing through Brussels ? If so, I trust you will allow me to do the honours—the honours of *Villette*, if you please, for I can show you Currer Bell’s house, and perhaps, if chance be-

friend us, M. Paul Emanuel and Madame Beck too.

M. Paul has grown old and grey-headed, but is petulant and vivacious as of old. Madame Beck has given up school-keeping, and retired on her laurels. Our English chaplain here remembers Charlotte Brontë perfectly. She came over with an introduction to his parents, and his province, as a lad, was to escort her back to school, after evenings spent at their house. A purgatorial process, he declares it was, from her invincible taciturnity. He remembers her, too, in the family circle, screwing her chair round by degrees, till her face was to the wall and her back to everybody, as I think Mrs. Gaskell relates. A strange woman, and a strange family! Was there ever anybody like them?

I have a school theme of Charlotte's in a delicate, girlish handwriting, and M. Paul Emanuel has quite a bundle of them. He remembers her with affection, Madame Beck with wrath.

Pray forgive the interminableness of this letter, which shocks me, and believe me, dear Madam,

Yours sincere and obliged.

January 29, 1870.

DEAR MADAM,

Your letter and Mr. Collins's little work reached me yesterday evening. I thank you cordially for both. The dips I have already made into it convince me I shall like it much, and that the tone and matter of it will be sympathetic to me. I think Mr. Collins's idea in this projected series of works¹ is a very happy, and especially opportune one at the present moment, when such a wonderful re-budding, leafing, and blossoming of the old classical stocks and stems is going on in England.

I have to thank you (too) for an interesting and admirable letter in the *Spectator*, which gratified me highly. I do not know how far the writer is founded in his inferences—not much, I think—but it is greatly to the honour of the Tennysonian Idylls that they should be capable of having such a system of symbolism grafted on these, with so little apparent hitch. The glory is restricted to the poems. It is much more out of keeping with the old romance.

Reviewers of every category, “indolent reviewers,” “staunch reviewers,” and “dis-

¹ Ancient Classics for English Readers.

loyal reviewers," are all saying their say over the "Holy Grail," and saying it mostly with a "but." I have had to fight for the poem in my own world, and have butted "buts" without end in its defence—though, as you are aware, I have a secret "but" or two of my own, which I do not confess to everybody. The "Grail" is a noble poem, and I rejoice and delight in it; but, as a whole, and after many readings, it continues to impress me with a sense of incompleteness. Why Tennyson should have repudiated the most pathetic part of the old legend, as given in the "Morte d'Arthur," his original, I cannot divine; but the result is that Sir Galahad's part in it becomes, as I have said, quite secondary, which it ought never to have been. As you observe, Sir Galahad should have been the great central light of the legend, and all the rest mere stars. There is the same constructive error involved in it as if one should tell the tale of the Redemption and make St. Peter more pronounced than the Christ.

Again, I hesitate over the monk Ambrosius, whom most critics and readers extol. He is very life-like and real, and I appreciate the artistic cunning of the device, and the

relief and contrast it affords ; but—*should he be in the poem ?* Isn't he a *profanity* in the midst of the solemn, mystical story ? Does not that story tend to fade into fable through contact with the mundane and matter-of-fact nature ? Tennyson has had recourse to the same expedient, and more justifiably and successfully on a former occasion, in the old "Morte d'Arthur," in which the prelude—

"At Francis Allen's, on the Christmas Eve—
The game of forfeits done—the girls all kiss'd
Beneath the sacred bush and past away"—

ushers in finely the sonorous strain :

"So all day long the noise of battle rolls
Among the mountains by the winter sea."

Here it is like opening a window seaward, after the babble and clatter of a social party, and letting in the long roll and rush of the Atlantic wave.

But Ambrosius is not a prelude. He is woven into the woof of the poem, and though his potter and prattle of "Old wives and their ills and aches," their "teethings and lyings-in," their "hens and eggs" is innocent enough, Heaven knows ! it clashes with my sense of sacredness, and in some of my moods is like the discord of money-changers in the Temple. To which I may add that

ordinary, shallow old Ambrosius, with his feeble wits and his half-faith, is but a queer recipient of such a revelation. Am I hypercritical in all this? Judge me.

Yes, there are splendid passages—the picture of the Hall of Merlin, and of the "dim rich city," climbing up to it—

"Roof by roof,
Tower after tower, spire beyond spire,"

and the flush of colour that we feel on our faces with those lines :

"And all the light that falls upon the board
Streams thro' the twelve great battles of the King."

And the fierce statuesque beauty of the group in "Sir Lancelot's Quest" :

"With sudden-flaring manes,
Those two great beasts rose upright like a man.
Each gript a shoulder, and I stood between."

And the glimmer of the Grail through the crannies of the door, and the passion and humility of the seeker . . . and more, and more, and more, over which let us say grace.

There is less of exuberance in this volume than we are used to in Tennyson. More of fruit than flowers. It has the tone of autumn

rather than of spring, as befits the poet's age. A less luxuriant leafage, but, I think, quite as much girth of trunk, and strength and stretch of limb. There are single lines, each an oak, and worthy of an oak's longevity. Another is "Lucretius," an oak forest in itself, every boll warped, every bough knotted and gnarled ; but a triumph of strength.

And, thereupon, what am I that I should say what I have said ! "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." When this thing is given, shall we carp and cavil at it—measure it with our foot-rule, and weigh it in our scales against this and that ? I grow shame-faced at the thought of my own ungenerousness.

Since writing the above I have had a visit from an eccentric old Englishman, the sun of whose life is Homer. I put Mr. Collins's volume into his hands, and he actually *glared* at it. If he had gobbled it up then and there I should not have been astonished, so hungry were his looks. But he did not. He went away, indeed, and will order a copy by to-day's post, I feel sure. His sun is Homer, the wine of his life is Plato, Horace and Lucretius are his daily bread. He has the smell of a block-book, a face like an Elzevir, and Mrs. Westwood flies to the ends

of the earth when his step creaks on the stair.

Pray forgive this nonsense, and especially forgive this lengthiness . . . but no, I will be rudely unapologetic, in the hope that, should you do me the honour to write again, you will put my "time" out of question, and believe it is entirely at your disposal.

I remain, dear Madam,

Very sincerely yours.

Do you know a "Quest of the Sangreall" by a Rev. S. Hawker? It is much more symbolical than Tennyson's, and has some good points. My copy is quite at your service if you feel any curiosity respecting it.

February 21, 1870.

DEAR MADAM,

I thank you much for your letter, and for the little book which accompanied "Brother Fabian." I can see that it pairs off worthily with its predecessor. Apart from his other claims, I like Mr. Collins for his love of Tennyson, a love which betrays itself in his writings with an amusing pertinacity. No sooner does he open his study window to the out-door air than a whiff of Tennyson, a Tennysonian perfume, a flush

of colour, is sure to make its way in. I wonder whether he is aware of my hand, through the same window, shaking his on such occasions!

Frederick Tennyson has certainly had scant justice done him. His brother's greater fame has stunted his. Perhaps, however, there may be a cause in himself for the partial hold on public favour he has obtained. He is scholarly, elegant, and harmonious, but wanting, it seems to me, in that sensuousness and humanness without which no poet, nowadays, is taken home to the popular heart. He gives me the idea of a man who has not lived *on* this earth of ours, but on some near sister planet ("yes, near enough to hear the blackbird sing," you remind me), from which he has been a spectator of our doings, but not a partaker of them. He gives us few real sensient men and women in his verse, but in their stead phantasms a many, vague impersonations, that he marshals before us, names, and dismisses. There is the "foot-rule" again, you see, and I am free to confess that, once upon a time, I might have liked Frederick Tennyson better than now—the time when I remember buying a little fat, podgy copy of Shelley, and reading part of

the "Revolt of Islam" under a gas-lamp in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Shelley was a far greater poet, but in his veins, also, was a crystal ichor instead of blood.

Frederick Tennyson has probably suffered from the secluded life he has led. An essay might be written, on the effects of exile and isolation on the mind and imagination of the poet—and a recent writer in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* proved, I think satisfactorily, that a gradual decadence had shown itself in all the works of Victor Hugo from the time he left Paris and the shock of men to play Prometheus on his Guernsey rock. Certainly, if you bring together the "Legende des siècles" and "L'Homme qui rit," you begin to shake and shiver at the ruin.

I have not heard again from Mr. A. D., and shall not probably do so, though I left a loop-hole open for fraternisation. The fact is, collectors do not care to fraternise. When I began to collect myself, I thought I had only to ask, to know. So I asked—and oh! for my harvest of knowledge! Nine out of ten collectors did not answer me at all—wished me at Jericho, while they cut open the *Times*, no doubt, and the one exception shrugged his shoulders, talked of his time,

did not know what he could do, and was very truly mine. I confess I do not understand this secretiveness in the owners of rare and precious things. If I possessed the sword Excalibur, I think I should like to air it now and then, and also my little speech, saying—

“King Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lovely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting on the deeps,
Upon the hidden bases of the hills.”

But no, the owners of Excalibur are satisfied with the owning, and like best to leave him in his sheath, triple-locked in their most inaccessible cupboard.

I know a bibliophile, who made a journey once from Brussels to Lyons to see a rare book in Mr. Y.'s collection, and whom Mr. Y. bowed away from his threshold, with a cool negative.

M. B. tells me you do not care for “Aurora Leigh.” Nor do I, as a whole—nor do I care, cordially, for any of her later poems, though there is perhaps greater force in them, and a wider reach of thought. What I love heartily and heartfully are her earlier works—the ones I have cited—the

one you cite yourself—the “Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus,” the “Knight and the Page,” the “Sleep” (a perfect little poem) and many more of that epoch—poems of the cell and the altar, pure as crystals, unique in our English verse. But even before her marriage a warp began to show itself in her genius, as far back as the “Drama of Exile,” in which she first introduced those jerky, impossible metres, unmanageable rhymes, and grotesque forms of expression. Was there ever such a Lucifer as hers in that poem! Such a perfect prig! Such an Old Bailey lawyer of a Lucifer! On the other hand, there is a splendid nugget in the “Drama,” the passage beginning—

“Eternity stands always fronting God, . . .”

and the relation between Lucifer and his Morning Star are very pathetic.

Have you seen any of Mrs. Browning's letters? They are terse and pithy, and very original. I will venture to send you one with this—a letter of the cloistered life—and when I write again (if you will permit me to write again) it shall be followed by her impressions of her life in Italy after marriage.

You know, I believe, what our intercourse was—that we never met face to face—and you will readily believe that the communication of her letters (which might all be printed to-morrow as far as third parties are concerned) involves no special indiscretion—at least I hope that such will be your opinion.

Poor M. B. complains of the cold, which has made its way into her garden of the Hesperides, and shrivelled the Golden Apples. It has been severe everywhere, and we have had our share of it in this country, especially in the outlying Ardennes, over which the bitter winds and snows have swept ruthlessly, and where lonely folk lie awake o' nights and hear the wolves scraping at the door, and joining their hungry howl to that of the north-easter.

In town we keep warm as best we may, and are less dismal than at St. Petersburg, which seems to have been completely buried and snowed up. The ice swarms with skaters, the boulevards are bright with sledges and musical with bells. The little park looks like a frosty fairyland, and if you are "Fine Ear" you catch the most delicate tinkling of crystal from every branch and spray, and

day and night the snow falls and falls, and not a whit lighter grows the sky.

M. B. told me you "were interested" in the scanty details I gave you of Charlotte Brontë. Did you divine the truth of her story, which Mrs. Gaskell only partially told? Did you divine that "Villette" was truer than the biography, and that the one true love of her life was M. Paul Emanuel? Such was the case, and who can blame? She came over, a poor, friendless, reserved, taciturn girl, and, in spite of the taciturnity and reserve, Paul Emanuel understood her. His eyes pierced through the quartz, and saw the diamond in the heart of it, and he made much of her and drew her out, and petted her and won her love.

There was no such foregone intention on his part—that was his practice with all his wife's most intellectual pupils—and, let me hasten to add, there was no illicit affection on his part, either. He was a worshipper of intellect, and he worshipped Charlotte Brontë thus far and no farther. When the evil was discovered there was an enforced parting, and she returned to England broken-hearted and despairing, and broken-hearted and despairing were the letters he received from

her for some time after. She told the whole story to a cousin of my wife's—a former pupil of his, and just one of those intellectual pupils whom he was wont to single out for preference. He told the story, and, I am sorry to say, he showed the letters also. He is a finished specimen of a Jesuit, but with all that a worthy and warm-hearted man.

Thanking you again for your most welcome and interesting letter,

I remain, Dear Madam,

Faithfully and truly yours.

March 5, 1870.

DEAR MADAM,

I confess to a wish, that was not quite a hope, that, if you were in town during our stay, the opportunity might be given me of making your personal acquaintance, and I thank you cordially for your proposition in that sense. We cannot, however, put you to the trouble of calling on us. You must allow us to call on you instead, and we purpose doing so on Tuesday next about 12 o'clock, if agreeable to you. Should another day or hour suit you better, pray say so without hesitation.

We feel very strange in London, and a little bewildered, after our quiet, humdrum Brussels life. The good friends we are staying with belong to a family, of which no mortal arithmetic could compute the members, and everybody is so hospitable and kind and so insensible to negatives, that should you detect in either of us some signs of incipient lunacy, you must not be alarmed. We will try not to be dangerous.

I had a few lines from M. B. She says that springtime has come back to her quiet nook, and dashes so much sunshine and greenery on her page as to make us, withered as we are with an east wind, rather envious. She bade us, if we went to the Crystal Palace, claim the acquaintance of Mr. Grove ("Groves of Blarney"?), and we went yesterday, but, I am sorry to say, shirked the duty. I do not think my heart goes out to editors generally. Did you ever shake hands with one and not feel his magazine crackle in your fingers? There is a notion that editors are men, but I think it is a mistake. They are merely incarnations of articles (mostly heavy) standing, not on legs, but on double columns.

April 9, 1870.

DEAR MADAM,

We have lapsed back again into this quiet life, and had no idea before, how quiet it was.

"In the afternoon we came unto a land,
In which it seemed always afternoon."

"A land where all things always seemed the same."

You know many such places, I dare say, and some of which it is even truer than of Brussels.

I know one or two in this country—little, drowsy, inland towns, mislaid or forgotten by the bustling world—in which the same small brown-cheeked boy sits munching the same apple on the same threshold, through time and eternity—where your *aubergiste*, greeting you at his inn door, grows nor fatter, nor thinner, nor older with the years, and where the same blue sky, with never a fleck of cloud, vaults you, perennially, overhead.

Do you know Dinant, on the Meuse? It is a fair type of such a town—a place in which you fear the fate of Rip Van Winkle—and with reason, for I passed a fortnight in Dinant once, and have maintained ever since that I should be thirty years

younger, but for that circumstance. They are fond of skittles there, and I played.

Dinant is hedged in by the unchangeable, the sleepy river on one side, the everlasting rocks on the other, and a narrow groove between, in which the "Vie Dinantaise" has crept and crept since the world began, without hope or dream of change.

I am insulting Brussels, of course, in associating it with Dinant; but Brussels also is immutable in its way. Life goes at a foot-pace in it—has no friskings of the blood, no fierce gallops, knows nothing either of London turbulence, or of Paris fever and effervescence. It is essentially a quiet little capital—*dead* quiet we found it after our London dissipation. I think we never were so dissipated before in all our married lives, and yet we saw no sights, only the old, old friends—the pleasantest sight of all, and one or two new ones, that . . . did not seem new. But fifteen years is a dangerous length of absence, and the most familiar faces had lost something of their familiarness. Time catches us by the button-hole on such occasions and makes us sum up the years of our lives in a friend's countenance. I hope my next visit to London will be soon

enough to spare me such uncomfortable tasks of addition.

Reverting to Mrs. Browning, I send you the promised after-marriage letter, merely premising that any passages flattering to myself in this or other of her letters, must be accepted as mere amiable assumptions on the part of the writer and without significance, in the absence of personal acquaintance.

The glimpse we had of your pug, in that coiffure which so admirably sets off his peculiar physiognomy and colour, emboldens me to enclose a second letter, which I think will amuse you. Mrs. Browning and myself were both possessors of Mitford dogs (hers, Flush—mine, Floss) and between these two many tender messages were continually exchanged. Both dogs lived to an advanced old age, saw more of the world than they expected, and died regretted. I am a great lover and respecter of dogs. There are few of them that one may not look *up* to on more points than one.

Our present specimen of doggery is a very minute one (a London acquisition), weighs two pounds, sits in the palm of my hand, and has the soul of a Titan. He took possession of our house the moment he entered it, and

has ruled paramount ever since, especially over a huge Angora cat, whom he startles out of her seven wits by attacking her on all sides at once. She has gone about the house with every particular hair standing on end ever since he came.

I think I am indebted to Mr. Denison for two numbers of *Land and Water*. I am not sure about the handwriting, but guess it to be his, as the papers contain articles on fishing literature. These must have amused him I should say, they are by such a very infantine bibliophile, in such a conspicuous bib and tucker. The child talks of Dame Juliana Berners as if she were his maternal great aunt, and lived round the corner. As for Wynkyn de Worde, he has just discovered him. I should have liked to ply the Babe with a query or two as to his alphabet and his dates, but benevolence forbids. He may be on the point of cutting his teeth. Should you see Mr. Denison, would you be kind enough to mention that a brother collector (Mr. Keale Heseltine) is about to bring his Angling Library to the hammer, and that I believe Sotheby is to be the auctioneer? The sale will be announced, but if Mr. Denison would like to see a list of

the books previously, I can send it him. I hear, with regret, of the death of Mr. Denison's nephew.

June 9, 1870.

DEAR MADAM,

I have been extinguished by many extinguishers since I wrote to you last, and my chief extinguisher has been a Turkish one. I have been working for the Great Turk, and fain to confess that of all the men of business I ever met with, he is the worst, especially in the matter of settlements. The Great Turk has a multitude of pockets, in one of which he always mislays his purse, and always fishes for it in the wrong one. Our last settlement took us three months to achieve, though the Grand Vizier helped in the search, and all the little viziers too. A dance of dervishes could not be more perplexing.

We have made one railway for this uncomfortable personage, and are full of pity for the poor folk who have gone and agreed to make several more. I am sure the first thing the Great Turk did, when the contract was signed, was to send for his tailor and multiply his pockets. Some day there'll be found a *hole* in the *right* pocket and *no purse at all*.

I send you with this a snippet of an article in *Notes and Queries*. The poems it accompanies, I believe, you have seen already. M. B. wished me to send them to "Groves of Blarney," but the wish came too late—and I confess to having been not altogether sorry.

I once lost (for a few minutes) in this town a little Maltese dog, and discovered him seated, an infinitesimal white dot, in the middle of the Grande Place, there quite deserted, by accident. Nothing more forlorn than he peering round wistfully for his master, in that limitless space, could be conceived. Now it occurred to me that these innocent Lamblings of mine would look just as forlorn if set down in the middle of *Macmillan's Magazine*, being mere waifs and strays, and having nothing in common with the literature of that print. They are less poems than relics, as I told my friend, and *Notes and Queries* is a sort of reliquary, in which they will not be seen out of character with their surroundings, and will be less fugitive also.

M. B. threatens me with a crusade against the Rossettis (in which you are to join), with a view to my conversion to the true faith. Honestly, I do not think I have

any positive proclivities in that direction. I like Christina Rossetti's poems very much, and fancy I should respect her personality. One of her two brothers pleaded for Swinburne and patronised Walt Whitman. That speaks for itself—and for him. In the other's poems I find some fine things. He appears to me a man of genius, but he does not attract me into making him a household god by any means. That is my case. You will see it is rather passive than active, and not at all combative. I could cite a good many poems in Dante Rossetti's books that I have read more than once, and that I shall read again—but there is nothing in them or in him to excite a spirit of partisanship in me—rather the contrary. We must admit, however, that these poems are neither Swinburnian nor Walt Whitmanish—they are the reverse, indeed, and decidedly anti-realistic. Your anecdote of the wife and the MS. which M. B. sent me is extremely rich. Such acts of sacrifice should be final; they are either that, or grotesque.

I have just received the *Macmillan's* for May and June—Jubal and Joanna Weston—and have glanced at the latter. It seems nicely done.

It was *not* Mr. Denison, but somebody else, that sent me "Land and Water." From all that I have heard of his nephew, his loss must have been an affliction to many. I met with one who knew him the other day, and who spoke of him with a praise that was both reverential and pathetic.

Mr. Denison, I understood you to say, wished to see some list of angling books—but *which* list was not clear to me. Was it my printed one? If so, I shall be happy to send him a copy. The one in *Land and Water* I did not think worth preserving,

I enclose some further letters of the Browning series, trusting to your frankness to say so, when you have had enough. I take them at hap-hazard.

This is not a letter, as you will perceive—it is merely a reminder that, though extinguished, I am not quite extinct.

Believe me, dear Madam,

Always sincerely yours.

I am delighted to accept your offer of a copy of the "Chronicle,"¹ of which I have neither original nor translation. I thought

¹ "Cronica," Jocelini de Brakelond—published by the Camden Society, 1840—from which Carlyle took "Past and Present."

it delicious in Carlyle's "Past and Present," and have often thought I should like to possess it. Do you know another old book that I think you would delight in—the "Four Bookes of Husbandrie" of Conradus Heresbachius—Councillor, towards the middle of the sixteenth century, of his High Mightiness, the Duke of Cleves? It was done into English, about 1670, by Barnabas Googe, who improved, I think, on the original.

At all events, the book, as it came out of his hands, is full of country sweetness and the "smell of the fields"—the bees sing buzzy in it, the birds sing through it—which does not prevent it giving us much pure theology and sound philosophy. Does your library possess this book? If not, my copy is at your disposal, and will gladly come to you, and if you care to have the Latin version with it, you can.

Another favourite old book of mine, but that you are more likely to know, is the "Philobiblion" of Richard de Bury, a genuine book-lover.

I am in particularly good spirits this morning, having just received from London a copy of the Duchess of Newcastle's first

volume of plays, a book I have sought for in vain for years. Her works are beloved of book-worms, but the most agreeable of them are the "Sociable Letters" and the *Life of the Duke*.

The way in which these dear great people buttered each other mutually in their prefaces and dedications is beyond measure delightful. The *Life* is the book that Lamb declares no binding can be too rich for; but he greatly exaggerated its scarceness. All the additions to my library are in old books now, to my wife's signal satisfaction, as, when a brace of visitors appear, there is now a chance at least of their getting a chair between them.

What do you think of Fred. Tennyson's *Poems*? Do they make your fingers' ends tingle? It has always been a bone of contention between me and M. B. that I am unable to appreciate F. T. I recognise his gracefulness, his elegance, his sweetness, but I cannot admit his force. He lacks the *Ancient Mariner's* "glittering eye," and fails to keep me, at least, from the wedding feast. "There was a ship, quoth he!"—but all the while I hear the bassoon, and before his tale is fairly begun I am merry in the

hall, where beards wag all. He seems to me too exclusively reflective. I hate muscular Christianity, but feel the want of a little of it in the poet. His backbone is not strong enough, and his blows have the weight of thistledown. His first volume ("Days and Hours") *bothers* me—excuse the incivility of the word—it is so full of vague impersonations of men-shadows—and, like the Lady of Shalott, one gets tired of shadows before long. The poet has lived too quiet a life, I think; he has neither been shouldered nor hustled by the world. He is vague, from living *out* of the world, and weak from want of enforced effort.

I like Rossetti better, with all his faults, which do not crop up much on the surface of his verse; that, I think, you will admit. As for Swinburne, he may have been influenced by Rossetti, but the seven chambers, swept and garnished, must have been ready for the seven devils without that intervention.

We have been leading the most rustic of lives this summer, among peasants chiefly, much interested in the field of potatoes, and helping to get in a beginning of the apple harvest. And we hate the town more than

ever, and shrink from the thought of coming back to it. A cottage and a pig is all we aspire to just now.

I enclose some further Browning letters. Do not hurry yourself to return them. Had I known they would have interested you so much, I would have sent them according to their date. As it is, not having marked those already sent, I run the risk of repetitions.

With my wife's kind remembrances,
Believe me, dear Madam,
Always sincerely yours.

October 18, 1870.

DEAR MADAM,

Old Conrad is on his way to you, and travelling faster, I venture to assert, than he ever did in the flesh. Pray keep him long, and send him back slowly—for compensation. It is a book for the blessed summer-time, to be read under a tree or on the shady side of a hay-cock—to be dipped into “promiscuous,” as the wind ruffles the leaves. I have not sent you the Latin original, because Barnabas Googe’s “enlargements” make up three parts of what is charming in the work. The subject stiffens

in the Latin, a language that does not lend itself to the expression of quaint domesticities and homely phrases.

I spoke of the summer. Woe for it, alas ! The country slumbered the other night beneath a purple heaven and all the stars, and the morning found it in its winding-sheet, ghostly and grey. We grieve for it, and grieve to be compelled to leave the country and the hearty, pleasant country folk. We like them better than the fine town-folk ever so much. Talk of civilisation and refinement ! *My* delights are in barbarism and ignorance. One gets so much more out of them. Civilisation is such a smooth-faced, blasé, emotionless thing.

Take children, for instance, and commend me to the little, bare-footed, dirty-faced thing of the lanes, whom a twopenny toy delights, and who breaks out into crowing and laughter at sight of a sugar-plum. Scarce crowing and laughter should I get, by any amount of giving, from the silken-frocked little damsel I met just now on her way to the town, bent on buying her sixteenth pair of earrings ! No exaggeration, I beg you to believe, and her mother confessed the fact unblushingly, and made me long

to ask (there was my barbarism) what she and her child had done to relieve the want and the misery that have overrun the land. I *did* allude to the fact, and the child blushed, which was a saving circumstance.

What you say about Frederick Tennyson is precisely what I feel. I can't keep him together. Pieces of him are always falling out. It's like trying to hold half a dozen oranges in one hand. Now one drops, now another. Rossetti seems to me an artist, F.T. an amateur. The one has thews and sinews, the other only sensitive and flexible nerves. Setting aside the materialism of him, which is not predominant (men are merciful to materialism, considering it perhaps a necessary element of the complete poetic organisation ; Shelley failed on that score) I cannot but think that if you could shut your eyes to what you know of Rossetti's personality you would find really fine things in his poetry. So far, my plea goes in his favour ; but, as I mentioned on a former occasion, I do not swear by him, or cling to him in any pertinacious way.

Spiritism appears to me to dwarf the intellect, and F. T. has certainly swept and garnished several cells of the brain for impish

habitations. The spirits took possession of a very clever friend of mine, and *he* seemed to lose a head and shoulders of the intellectual stature in consequence. I remember his telling me once that a defunct aunt of his had rapped herself into communication with him, and had let him know that she was rising in the scale of beatitude, and that she hoped soon to be able . . . to do without her spectacles. He repeated this gravely to me, and seemed quite unaware of the burlesque idea of a ghost in spectacles.

Through one medium a copy of verses was imparted to me from a deceased friend of mine. They were a sad falling off, and I was compelled to admit that, if such verse passed muster among the spirits, there must be a great want of Saturday reviewers in the separate state. Feebleness and folly are all one gets out of such revelations, I think. I will not touch on the impiety, which is the graver side of them, or on the roguery and charlatanism that appears to be their natural fruit.

You have probably seen the enclosed manifesto of Victor Hugo's. It is interesting as a type of modern Gallicism—its bombast, its vanity, its windy emptiness.

How one longs to bring these lying, shrieking, bragging newspaper men together, and drop an extinguisher on them for good and all! Would anybody be the worse for such an extinction?

The little dog "Jess" that you are kind enough to inquire about is thriving thus far. The true mistress of the house is She. We know her real character now, and it is execrable. She holds human nature to be a *rat*; and to worry human nature, and yelp at the heels of human nature, is her one vocation.

Sometimes I am disposed to try the treatment of the Jackdaw of Rheims, and "curse her by candle, by bell, and by book," but it would be ineffectual I know. She is promising us an accession of her race, and the idea is simply insupportable. Three or four little Jesses would turn our peaceable house into a lunatic asylum. I have come to the conclusion that toy terriers are charming little creatures . . . at dog-shows.

If this letter does not set *you* brooding on extinguishers, dear madam, I shall be surprised.

Believe me, notwithstanding,

Ever sincerely yours.

I need not tell you I shall value the "Chronicle" much more for the circumstance you mention.

January 16, 1871.

DEAR MADAM,

Jocelyn has reached me, and Jocelyn is very welcome. Jocelyn and I foregather by the fireside; he just separates my knees and my nose, and very jolly I find him as gossip and companion. I was a little afraid of his Latin, my erudition in that department being now by no means what it was when dear old Mary Lamb had me in keeping, and tried me sorely by locking up my fishing-rods; but I am gratified to find that I get on very well, Jocelyn's monkish lingo being far less troublesome to an ignoramus than is classical Latin, with all its elegancies and involutions.

I can see already that it is a racy old book, one of a kind not half numerous enough—the *personal* books—for, rich as antique literature is in most of the essential elements, it is poor in details of the personality of its writers, in their feelings, their domesticity, the minutes of their daily lives. Look at the old books of travels; they all

seem cast in a mould ; there is no personality in them. You may associate them with any name you choose ; the name is nothing. Now Jocelyn is a sort of mediæval Pepys in his limited way, and oh ! the worth of mediæval Pepyses ! I am sure I shall delight in him.

You will be glad to hear that he travelled hither in very suitable and sanctified society. His travelling companion was old Heywood's "Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels," a quaint and curious book. I found in it a poem, which seems to me to have suggested Mrs. Browning's poem,¹ beginning, I think, "Thou, art thou like to God?" If you have not the book I will send you the poem, which is poetically worth copying.

Is your library rich in glossaries and old dictionaries ? A botanico-literary friend of mine wishes to prove the occurrence of "columbine" (the plant) in a writer anterior to Shakespeare. I cited the word as a *colour* in Chaucer, who describes the eyes of his lady as "eyen columbine," or dove-like, and, as the last syllable of the word results, say the learned, from a peculiar inner structure of the plant at a certain stage of

¹ "The Image of God."

its growth resembling two little doves I maintained that the plant's name must also have been in use at Chaucer's period.

But, says somebody, "*colombina*" is employed in Italian as an epithet of endearment, little dove; and, if so, what becomes of the *bine* in its dual botanical sense? Do not you consider botany rather a bore? and are you not feeling it so now? But I thought if you had "*Florio's Old Dictionary*" (resolute Florio's) it might throw some light on the matter.

Feeling, as you do, an interest in Mrs. Browning's letters, it may amuse you to look through the recent memoirs of Miss Mitford, if you have not done so already. The third volume is chiefly made up of Miss Mitford's letters to Mrs. Browning. As letters, they are by no means remarkable, but so many people of note are mixed up with them, and the woman herself was so sweet and true and loveable, that one cannot but read them sympathetically. Now and then, however, she gives me goose-flesh—as, for instance, where she avows not caring for Charles Lamb's letters, because they are "not elegant enough" to please her! or being indifferent to Tennyson, because everybody idolises him.

What is the distant town in which you are in the habit of wishing your most tiresome correspondents? Is it in Jericho (under the walls), or Timbuctoo, or Seringapatam, that I ought to be at this moment?

Always, dear Madam,

Sincerely yours.

March 6, 1871.

MY DEAR MADAM,

I sent you a hasty word yesterday. To-day I forward with this the remaining Browning letters, with the exception of a few I have inserted in the various volumes of her works—the latter being one of my crotchets. I like to associate with my favourite books an autograph letter and the portrait of the writer. Just so much of the personality of authors pleases me; I seldom care to go much further. Personal intercourse disturbs one's ideal, and often lowers it unjustly. Authors give us the best of themselves in their books; in their daily lives we see too much of their more trivial aspects.

March 5, 1871.

MY DEAR MADAM,

The worst of sinners am I, but yet

have been more sinned against. If you only knew what lives we have led for some months past! Being torn to pieces by wild horses must be a perplexing sensation, but being torn to pieces by wild men and women is even worse, I think, and that has been our fate. Did I say we were bears, and knew nobody? It was a mistake. We know everybody, and everybody knows us, and all the "Old Men of the Sea" in Christendom have been sitting on our shoulders . . . are not twenty crooked legs throttling us at this moment? What incidents I could relate if I had months before me instead of minutes!

Amongst others, fancy my having a real un-metaphorical madman sent to my charge from Paris, and my having to pick him up at an hotel, and being pushed by him into a corner directly he saw me, and pummelled then and there. *He* was my worst Old Man of the Sea. But he came to me yesterday, clothed and in his right mind, and as unconscious as a babe of the bitter trouble he had caused. There has been an actual epidemic of madness amongst the French refugees, brought about, naturally, by the loss of fortune, reverse of position, and

general shattering of their household gods. I think you can scarcely be aware, in your sheltered, well-ordered England, how much the frontier countries have been affected by the sea of misery that has washed into them, without ebb or respite, since the war began. We selfishly tried, at first, to keep high and dry, but it could not be, and we were soon up to the lips.

Your delightful letter, which I was ungrateful enough (or grateful, which ?) to wish twice as long, was my last real pleasure, and I have had it in my pocket-book ever since, hoping to be able to answer it in some chance pause of the hubbub. Since peace has been signed there *has* been a pause, and the agitated, half-starved, distraught multitude that have thronged our thoroughfares so long are beginning to flit homewards—such, at least, as have homes left.

The Browning marriage took place in 1846. I fancy the jar and discordance in her music was caught from the old writers, on whose style hers was based in its earlier period.

After her marriage she took a further warp, and adopted her husband's perverse penchant for impossible measures and broken

rhythms. I confess to a scanty sympathy with her poetry after the "Duchess May" volumes, but all my heart goes out to "Margret" and "The Poet's Vow," and the "Deserted Garden" and "The Sleep." Those poems were a revelation and a joy to me, and, of all my poetical enthusiasms, none have been more intense than my enthusiasm for them.

Thanks for the Columbine search! Mine has gone no further. In "Continental Herbalists," about the date of Turner, it is mentioned as an English name for the flower, and I have little doubt that an ante-Shakespearean occurrence of it might be found; but to search without some definite clue is only to be thought of in the dearest of leisure moments. Hunting over old books is my delight, and, of all incentives thereto, commend me to "Notes and Queries."

What about the Tennyson business? Is the war-hatchet buried between us? and is Blackwood going to print him? I should like very much to know.

This is a scramble, not a letter—forgive it and me—and believe me always, dear Madam,

Faithfully and truly yours.

I am anticipating a dreadful bore. The nephew of an old friend of mine, went to China in his youth, and married a Chinese wife, and at present he rejoices in a sickly little daughter, with no joints to speak of, and neither here nor there, and she is to be placed at school in Brussels, and I am to see that this broken china does not come to further grief, and I have a conviction that she will have a pea-green complexion, and be always hankering for swallows' nests, and that her school-fellows (rosy-faced, yellow-haired young Saxons) will worry her life out and be poking their fun at her from morning till night.

I have done all I could to stave off the infliction. I have talked of the bloom on the peach, and how continental schools were sure to rub it off, and what a much better thing home-education was for young girls; and when this failed I dilated on the unhealthiness of Brussels—how smallpox was raging, and typhus was beginning, and what a very poor sort the Belgian faculty was! In vain, in vain, she is coming, and father and mother and a party of Chinese friends are to accompany her, and . . . I have no chop-sticks.

Excuse my incoherence, and believe me
always, dear Madam,

Very sincerely yours.

June 12, 1871.

MY DEAR MADAM,

On referring to the date of your last letter, I feel very much taken aback, but M. B. may perhaps have told you, that soon after the receipt of it I came to grief, and lost my head, and between the decapitation and recapitation several weeks elapsed. Here we have had Siberian days, and great was my astonishment, last Saturday, on issuing forth in the morning with my greatcoat up to my ears, to meet, instead of the customary yelps of the east wind, at the corner, Spring—Spring with a breath as sweet as a cow's, and all sorts of little feathery and fleecy clouds fluttering out and about over the blue, like lambs released from the fold, after stress of weather. I turned my back on my office, and tucked my wife under my arm, and we went and enjoyed "the sweet smell of the field" at suburban Boitsfort.

Your letter actually found me surrounded by the Chinese party. There she sat, that

“heathen Chinees,” with the corners of her eyes twitched up to her forehead, with a yellow smile meandering round her mountainous cheek-bones, and talking such incomprehensible gibberish as made my hair stand on end. My wife declares it was *not* so unintelligible, and that there was a sprinkling of common sense in her chatter; which might be, but the horror of the position overcame me, and I am told I broke away frantically at last, and was seen rushing to a side-table and attempting to drink six glasses of wine at once.

Fortunately, the party were not all heathens, and amongst them was an old friend, Henry Woods, an artist, whose name you have met with in Mrs. Browning’s letters. He illustrated her “Legend of a Brown Rosary,” and also the “Fairy Queen” of Spenser. He is the most modest and timid man in the world, full of artistic and poetic feeling and faculty of appreciation, which nobody would ever suspect. I had not seen him for five-and-twenty years, and he looked quite strange to me; but little by little the old face came back and became familiar again, and, with the old face, all the old buried time and its associations, the old,

happy, youthful days, the quiet village life, the little knot of friends, the readings aloud, the confabulations, the enthusiasms—eheu ! eheu !

The juvenile Chineese is a good many shades prettier than her parent. She is a mixture of the Asian and European that is not unattractive. I am happy to find that her habits are civilised, and that she has outlived her partiality for outlandish eating. The poor people are mooning about on the Rhine at this moment, having suffered the utmost severity of the weather for the last three weeks.

Little Jess is an improving character ; her temper is softening and her bump of fun is developing. She lies on her back and laughs for hours together, and has such frantic fits of activity, such wild races round tables and dodges between chairs, that it is marvellous her small brains have not been dashed out ere this. Her chief defect and cardinal sin is gluttony. She is the greatest little pig in all doggery.

Do you happen to have seen my "Opus Magnum," a wee book I wrote for a bairnie of ten years old in times past ? It's what I'm proudest of. The bairnie is my sister-in-law,

and grown out of all knowledge now, the graceless girl! The book has been long out of print, and I have but one copy left, which I should like to lend you, if you have not seen it.

Excuse this hasty, unworthy scrawl, and believe me, dear Madam,

Always faithfully yours.

August 26, 1871.

MY DEAR MADAM,

Your letter was a pleasant sight. Did you believe what I said about my patience? It was a horrible fib: I was not patient at all; I never am. I am *impatience* personified. But I *was* convinced that your time must be much engrossed in London, and that you would write to me with recovered leisure.

We enjoyed our brief sojourn at Spa immensely, and were there at a propitious moment as regards the aspect of the place. There had been heavy rain previously, and all the land was alive with little leaping brooks, that babbled with the birds by day and—

“To the sleeping woods all night
Warbled their quiet tune.”

They were a delight in themselves. I think there are few things in nature so suggestive of childhood and innocence and the golden age as these crystal-clear mountain streams, that bound and foam and flash, and are as fresh as when the world began. The drawback at Spa was the people of distinction. The village swarmed with them, and they behaved abominably. Such manners and morals, and such a frightful confusion of *meum* and *tuum* in matters conjugal I never before witnessed. There was one English item in the throng—the Duke of Newcastle—descended from that grand old duke of two centuries back, whose horses all worshipped him with genuflexions, and whose duchess worshipped him also, and not otherwise. Do you know his great book on horsemanship, in which he is depicted in a triumphal car, the centre of a circle of horses all on their knees? The present duke has two bairnies, a boy and a girl, that are charming to behold.

I wonder whether English folk who live at home appreciate fully the beauty of English children. They are so very lovely! “Non Angli, sed angeli.” That tender saying of the bishop of old days is every whit as true

now as when it was uttered. "Non Angli, sed *angeli*"—it is not the mere beauty—it is the *angelhood* of them. Out of England, they are observable in a special sense certainly, because there is no such thing as a French or Belgian child. Babes, on this side the water, are all born five-and-twenty, with their wisdom-teeth cut.

I am much amused by all you tell me about Morris. There is nothing crotchety in his verse. One wishes there were sometimes. The "Earthly Paradise" certainly improves on acquaintance. It is undeniably mellow and nutty and nice. It has Chaucerian glints and flavours, but it is never *great* poetry; it never rises above a respectable level. It deserves a *succès d'estime*, and all it has earned over and above that (heaps and heaps, by the way) is a mystery for me. To name him in the same breath with Tennyson is an infinite profanity in a critical sense. What have they in common?

There is something unaccountable in the caprices of public taste just now—Tennyson was to be dethroned because there was not sufficient stuff in him, and now Morris is idolised, who is but a simple *conteur*.

We may dress our dames in Elizabethan

ruffs and ourselves in slashed doublets, but we cannot prevent the age that is from poking into our sixteenth century-ribs and slapping our mediæval shoulders. We may build ourselves Gothic houses, but modern butcher-boys *will* talk Cockney slang to our archæologic maids, telegrams must flutter in at our doors, the *Times* lie on our breakfast-table, and, as you say, the arm-chair we sit in is mostly of a modern fabric. I fear such notions are mere artistic fopperies, but there would be no great harm in them if they were not pushed to extremes. To make your wife ape a life that is not natural to her, and play a part, even on the domestic hearth, to turn her from a help-meet into a puppet, this is more than a foppery: it is a fault.

When we left Spa, we returned to our country quarters, in Boitsfort.

The other evening, roaming across the fields after sunset, I came upon Mariana's Moated Grange. The very place, a deserted old manor-house with ruined gables, moss-coated walls, and a wild, weedy garden. A green scum covered the water of the moat, and beyond the garden hedges lay a marsh fringed with poplars. As I eyed the place,

wondering at its weirdness and fancied that, in some upper chamber, Mariana must be lying dead, or I should have heard her moan, a mist gathered on the surface of the marsh, gathered and curdled and crept, and, ere my dream was at an end, it had swallowed me up—me and the moated grange, and all its surroundings. I had to feel my way back by the garden paling to the upper ground I had left.

This marsh is one of the peculiar features of the place. Every night the white mist oozes out of it, sometimes clinging to its face, sometimes seething upward in the rapid way I have described. In the moonlight it has a ghostly shimmer. There are no bitterns in my marsh, but I often see a heron flapping its lazy way to the fish-pond at the head of the valley.

He and I fish together, in fact, *longo intervallo*, and I interpret the wild, solitary cry he utters, at intervals, into grace after fish. When often heard, I suspect his creel is heavier than mine. And, besides the marsh and the ponds, there is a wide stretch of breezy heather, purple now as any plum, and a girdle on all sides of forest-land—which makes up enough of the picturesque,

I think, for a locality not ten minutes distant (by railway) from a great town.

My "Opus Magnum" is on its way to you by post, since you have kindly beckoned to it. If I reprinted the book, I should omit some part of it as being beyond the sentiment of childhood. It is a mistake that is always made, in a degree. Once we have grown up, and strengthened and stiffened, it is not easy to get our feet again into the little shoes, and dwindle, dwindle, till we have to stand a-tiptoe to see what is on the table. The critics praised my book, and my spirits were not raised by it; but when I was told by one of them (Hepworth Dixon) that his little boy insisted on having the book under his pillow when he went to bed, I knew that I had not wholly failed.

Did you ever see such a horror of a frontispiece? That "gammon and spinage"—called "printing in colours"—should be suppressed by Act of Parliament.

November 4, 1871.

I was going to write to you, because I had got together a few final Browning letters, scattered in books and drawers and corners.

I send them with this. In one (and it is the only instance of such a thing) there is the faintest possible indication of ruffled temper. I allude to the letter in which she adverts to my appreciation of the "Seraphim" or the "Drama of Exile." My opinion, however, remains the same. Setting aside a few very powerful passages (such as "Eternity stands ever fronting God," etc.), the "Drama" has always seemed to me an unmanageable poem—flawed with eccentricities, faults of haste, impossible rhythms, aberrations which continued to show themselves in all she wrote from that date.

The subject of the "Seraphim" is an unapproachable one, no doubt; but, with all its defects, it is a poem to be read on the knees, so saintly is the soul of it. And I had been on my knees so long reading it, ever since when a lad on a school form I first heard in it, in a rapture, the rustle of the seraphic wings. So I stood up for my "Seraphim," positively and pugnaciously, and it is a satisfaction to me to know those critical judgments were mostly on my side, and that the poet herself, when the heat of composition had cooled down, acknowledged her "Drama" to be a failure. I hear —

is "morbid," and afraid of "becoming poor"—the latter an ugly symptom—

"Oh, sorrow, sorrow, sorrow!"—

where a poet's singing-robes are padded with bank-notes, and his inspiration signifies so much a year! It was better in old times when he lived in Grub Street, and was out of elbow, and had a sinking at his stomach for lack of sustenance. He died in rags, it is true, but was a whole man. Now he dies in purple and fine linen, with softened brains.

I have just seen in the newspaper the announcement of the death of a neighbour of mine at Boitsfort. I knew nothing of the individual personally, but he had a little maid, a mite of five years old, that all Boitsfort knew and petted, and whose habit was to toddle across the fields to the station alone, every afternoon, to meet her father coming from the town. "Père est là, Monsieur?" she was sure to ask of me, if I chanced to be the first arrival—"Père est là?" for she was so small, and the wheat was so tall, she could not see her father six yards off.

Then I used to lift her little curly head

above the level of the corn, give her a glimpse of pater, kiss her, and set her down. There our acquaintance stopped, but I am sorry to think I shall never hear that pretty question from her lips again.

We are unsettled at Boitsfort—and I am thinking of the Moated Grange.

P.S.—I am going very near the "Livres à figures" of the eighteenth century in France. Surely there never was so suave and harmonious a development of art. We have had nothing corresponding to it in England, unless we admit Stothard, who is but a feeble instance—a sort of sham Watteau.

It is a pity that the literature connected with this art should be at war with modern notions of morality.

Begging you to present our kind remembrances to Lord Northampton, and with my wife's especial remembrances to yourself, I am, dear Madam,

Always sincerely yours.

November 6, 1871.

DEAR MADAM,

Is Jericho far enough away, or will you wish me farther, on receipt of this? It

encloses another last letter of the Browning series—one not of much moment, but which, for the sake of completeness, I send you.

The post is going out, so my loquacity must be brief indeed. I have been at Boitsfort all day house-hunting, and have had another glimpse of the Moated Grange. This time I saw it in sunshine, and it looked—I know not why—wierder, ghostlier, more sinister thus than it had done in the twilight and the mist.

The place attracted and repelled me at once, and especially the latter. As an habitation it was not to be thought of. I had foreknowledge we should all be ague-stricken in it, that we should all yellow and wither and wane, and die miserably in those mouldy chambers, with that ghastly fog seething and simmering outside the walls.

Strange to say, there was a human creature in the garden, dressed like a “Beguine,” pacing up and down, black, slow, solitary, among the poplar boles. Was it I that crooned—

“She only said, ‘The day is dreary,
He will not come,’ she said.
She said, ‘I am weary, weary,
I would that I were dead!’”

And then those other lines came into my memory, that—

“Most she loathed the hour
When the thick-moted sunbeam lay
Athwart the chambers, and the day
Was sloping toward his western bower.”

Was it for this that the Grange looked wierder in the daylight than the gloaming?

I turned my back on it, walking away with great strides, but with an effort, for I had been struggling all the while with a wish to cross the moat—to push open the door—to enter—and with a persuasion that if I did so I should never come back again. My friends, I mumbled to myself, will come seeking me—they will enter in my tracks—they will find my foot-prints in the dust of deserted corridors, of awful inner rooms, upstairs, downstairs, out again into the garden, down the central avenue among the poplar boles, on . . . to the marsh and the wind. . . .

You see, the horror and glamour that radiate from something inside that grange were growing too much for me, so I strode away.

The next house I went to see was the brightest, cheerfulest, sunniest little cottage in the village, but there also I found a cloud

of sadness. Over the mantelpiece in the sitting-room was the portrait of my little maid, the little maid I used to lift above the corn to see her father coming from the town. It was her home.

I came back rather confused. Am I in Jericho, or a little crazy—which?

In any case I am,

Dear Madam,

Always sincerely yours.

I have not seen any of the collected works of Bret Harte. What I have seen in extract I have liked. I am reading the *Quarterly* on Spiritualism. It has great weight. The article on Byron and Tennyson is stupid, discreditable, and *shoppy*.

December 17, 1871.

DEAR MADAM,

First, let me thank you for the charming photographs, which we are delighted to have. That vast pleasance at Castle Ashby baffles me, however, beautiful as it is, but at Compton Wynyates I drop into a dream of delight. The moat view reminds me of Edgar Poe's "House of Usher." The front makes me wish to pack up my goods and

my wife and go and live there straightway. When you visit it next, let diligent search be made in outlying chambers and small turret nests, for—who knows? It tempts me much more than the Moated Grange. Its weirdness looks gracious. "A home of ancient peace," it seems to me, notwithstanding those troublous initials over the doorway. Surely life must slip down easy grooves beneath those ancient trees! Thank you again and again for these views. We could already associate you with Northampton House—now we shall be able to associate you with your country homes, and so lessen the distance and the strangeness.

I was glad to know your opinion of the "Last Tournament"—glad to know it is what it is. At sight of the poem I went down on my knees, as in duty bound. When I had read twenty lines I stood up straight and stiff, and my knees have had no joints for the poem since. From first to last (a few lines excepted) it is an *ugly* poem. I can find no fitter word to express it. It gives me "goose flesh," as a dissecting-room in a hospital would.

Wonderful exceedingly is the change that has come over the poet in this respect, he

that was so full of grace, so pregnant with beauty, so overflowing with fancies and phrases of subtle loveliness! I think this change came first in "Lucretius"—it was prominent often in some loud, virulent Billingsgate (which one had to omit in the reading) in "Pelleas," and now the coarseness and violence are patent.

The poem was written less from inspiration, I take it, than from a supposed necessity. In the Babel the poet had built a brick seemed wanting, and he set to work to make it, without straw. In fact, it tells against the entire series of Idylls that they are a mosaic, and not a unity—an idea enlarged rather than a single large idea; and another defect, as some critic has rightly observed, is the modernness of allusion in them. "King Arthur as a modern gentleman" was well enough in a dream, but objectionable in the poem. It is like knocking holes in stained-glass cathedral windows and mixing broad sunshine with "religious light." The glare is subversive of the romance. My sincere and unwilling opinion is that it is a case of intellectual decadence, in which decay has struck first at the instincts of taste, tact, and judgment. In proof of the latter, take the

comparison of the breaking wave, which, fine in itself, becomes grotesque through incongruity. A drunken ruffian drops from his horse into the mire, and his fall is likened to the breaking of a great wave on a lonely shore, under the moon !

And my friend at Freshwater looks forward to more CEnones and May Queens and Ladies of Shalott, for new flowers of the spring and gushings of young waters. *My* vision is of a sadder sort. I see the poet *outside* his Eden, and behind him the shut gate and the sworded angel.

Talking of breaking waves, I witnessed that spectacle very often at Blankenberg this summer, with an added element of beauty, for the seas were phosphorescent, and every wave as it rolled in was capped with flame. I used to stand on the beach after nightfall and let the waves break at my feet, and every stamp of my foot struck up a shower of sparks. Even the austere, taciturn Blankenberg fishermen grew eloquent as they described their return home at midnight over those seas of fire.

Yes, Queen Jess is dead, and King Tiny reigns in her stead. Long live King Tiny ! We are very much ashamed, of course. We

can never pretend to sentiment any more. Our friends pelt us with satirical darts, even from so far off as Castle Ashby ; but, there's Tiny . . . he is pretty and playful, and . . . it can't be helped.

Tiny (he inherited that distinguished name from his first possessor) belonged to a very poor man, who, in his distress, *pawned* the doggie, and we released him from that limbo. He came over in a bird-cage by the Antwerp steamer, and won the heart of a benignant stewardess, who shared with him her cabin and her lap.

When let out of his cage on arriving, Tiny danced a saraband on his hind-legs, and threw several somersaults in rapid succession. He has been in the jolliest spirits ever since, from which we infer that his sensibilities are not of a morbid kind. So, long live King Tiny ! Though, with a skull like an egg-shell, I don't see how it should happen.

I have not seen Blackwood lately, nor the tale you mention, but will look out for it. One of the tales that has pleased us most of late is " My Little Lady." I thought it very remarkable. A really good novel is the hardest thing in the world to find just now, and especially a well-written one,

for there is a grammatic demoralisation afloat that threatens to invade all phases of literature, and especially, I am bound to confess, our lady novel-writers are slipshod and slatternly. Have you read Miss Evans's new tale? She, at least, is an exception to the above innuendo.

April 6, 1872.

MY DEAR MADAM,

We found a welcome presence in our deserted town house a few evenings ago, when we flitted back thither from the country. Out of the letter-box I extracted your budget. A generous letter it was, and a pleasant, and much amused was I when, reading it to myself, my wife suddenly asked me "Why I looked so cock-a-hoop?" I had just come to the passage about bindings, and learned the honour you were doing to my unworthy book. When I read the letter aloud, I have a notion we *both* looked cock-a-hoop. . . . But first, about the Browning letters. There was always that gap. My worthless memory (had it been less worthless that Lamb essay you desiderate would have been written long ago) will not allow of my recalling the details of the case, but I fancy

there must have been a break in our correspondence *previous* to the marriage.

We (three of us) had been living in the country under a sort of charm, and the charm held us for years. We read each other's books, and exchanged each other's thoughts, as E. B. B. supposed, and she was our oracle and divinity. But it chanced, by some stress of circumstance, I forget what, we looked up one day from our mirror, like the Lady of Shalott, and the spell was broken, the mirror cracked from side to side, and we saw Sir Lancelot by the river, and heard his "tirra-lirra." A few days later, and we were all scattered. Business caught *me* in its whirl, and my friend and his wife cut themselves adrift from country life and took to wandering, and never settled again. The grave has since closed over them both, and those studious and pleasant times seem to lie far, far away, almost in some former existence beyond the life that is. This I know: E. B. B.'s marriage was told me by somebody else. How R. B. insisted on making her acquaintance, and forcing the cloister gates. How, one fine morning, she walked out of those gates without her father's knowledge, met R. B. at church and married

him, and how they flitted to Italy immediately after. From that time our correspondence, as you will have perceived, was fitful and intermittent, and dislocated by uncertainties; but I think you have seen the whole of the letters, with the exception of one written from Paris, in which she felicitates me on my marriage, and indulges in such kindly but erroneous appreciations and interpretations that my modesty will not allow me to send it to you.

When next you meet R. B. I wish you could suggest his publishing a volume of her letters. Hers was such an exceptional case; her correspondence was so purely literary. She had so little communication with the outdoor world that the passages must be few indeed that her editor would have to suppress.

And then one loses so much by waiting. The world drifts into other ways. The old love dies out, the old interest wanes. Such a book must always possess a sterling value; but, given to the next generation it will have lost half its charm. Of course, we should not expect R. B. to give us his "Letters from the Portuguese," but such relics of his wife (as these of mine) must be very numerous.

Yes, I have a passion for bindings, and am delighted to hear that you have hope of a great English binder in Birdsall. It is a form of genius that England has scarcely produced as yet, unless we accept Roger Payne, and, as an instance, Charles Lewis was much bepraised by Dibdin and his clan, but I never could discover why.

Our great defect in this department I take to be the "square-toes" style we adopt. We are strong, we are heavy, our right angles are very correct, our leather is sound, our gold good, but we lack imagination and elevation, we lack suavity and mellowness; our binding is a trade, and not an art. In France, on the contrary, from the times of Grolier and Maioli downward, it has been an art, and not a trade, and very beautiful are many of the specimens Paris sends out even now. I know nothing more charming than an artistic binding of Bansonnet or Lostic, and, as for Deromes, continental book-collectors give mad prices for them, and run mad after them. Only the other day a choice specimen of Deromes's binding sold for £320, the value of the book it covered being about £20!

I have some pretty French bindings among

my books, and especially a Lafontaine, by Lostic, that is charming in its way ; but I have no Groliers or Maiolis, nor even a Roger Payne—nor even a Roger Payne's *bill*, which some collectors value above his bindings.

Of English square-toes bindings I have heaps upon heaps. How the rafters stand them I don't know. Do you like the "Jansenist" style—the plain caskets, the gems inside? It is much affected here.

If I could possibly have foreseen the compliment you were going to pay me I should have had so much pleasure in sending you a large-paper copy of "The Quest."

We have turned our backs on the Moated Grange, and taken the house of the little maid, and are fairly installed in it. And I am over head and ears in gardening, deep in the mysteries of Japanese lilies, Erfurt asters, and heaven knows what other floral conceits. I do half the gardening myself, and go to rest at night without a joint in my body.

June 10, 1872.

MY DEAR MADAM,

Just a word in haste to say I have sent to your address at Castle Ashby, by to-day's post, the L. P. copy of "The Quest."

I wish I were capable of telling you at the same time how much I am touched by your excessive kindness to this waif and stray of mine, but I can't. You must believe it in pure faith, and indeed you *may* do so, for it is the sincerest of verities.

I like the specimens of your binder's gilding that you have sent me. They are well executed. I perceive he uses *colour* (the block is laid on, is it not, in the *fleur de lys*?). Can he also work in inlaid coloured leathers? It is a more difficult and delicate operation, but its durability and artistic value are greater. A friend of mine spent a large sum on a Maioli binding in different colours, and a few drops of water fell on it unperceived, and blurred it all over. Of course, this ought not to have occurred even with a coloured surface, but there is always a danger.

I think the design you project for "The Quest" will be very tasteful, as far as I can judge. Some day I will ask your man to do a little binding for me, when I have something in hand that I think will be congenial to him. The great drawback in binders generally is the want of education. There goes so much to make a really accomplished

binder. It is quite a wide sphere of study and observation, setting aside the material question altogether.

Some of the Paris binders have rather a grand style. We have a man here who has made himself a reputation as a gilder, and he related to me, the other day, how he had been to Paris and made the acquaintance of one of the crack binders of the day, Bansonnet, or another. He found the great man at work in his *atelier*, gilding an important volume; the central ornament was wanting, and when he heard the name of his visitor he proposed that he should put it in. This was done then and there, and with great success. Then the Paris binder went up to his Brussels confrère, kissed him on both cheeks *avec effusion* and introduced him to his wife and daughter. It is a pity he was a married man, or the little incident might have had a romantic *dénouement*.

Does your man admire Roger Payne's *work*? Was not it a trifle savage? The man himself looks an awful pauper in the portrait you allude to. I have it in Dibdin's "Bibliographical Decameron."

Lake, mumbling and mouthing his own poetry ever and always, and ignoring every-

body else's, and hard lines (!) his friends had of it. A well-meaning relative once gave me Wordsworth's "Prelude" for a birthday gift, and I remember having a nightmare after it. I dreamed that the poet had kidnapped me into a gully of the hills, where there was no outlet, and that he made me listen to a repetition of that tremendously slow poem, from end to end. It was awful.

My wife and I have been a-fishing. I have a little trout-stream in the Ardennes (a stream in Arden sketches it) which is a jewel, in its way. It is called Le Bouc,¹ and is a perfect kid of a stream, for friskiness and jollity. There had been rains in the hill-country, previous to our excursion, so the little water-course was in mad spirits, bubbling over its waterfalls, and rushing and raving across the shallows. It was bright as crystal, musical as a thicket of nightingales, and reminded one of the beginning of things, and of the morning of the world.

There is never anything fit to eat in an Ardennes inn, so we had to regale on trout, morning, noon, and night, and nobody, I think, knows what trout is who has not eaten them by the stream side; as for gray-

¹ So called from its leaping characteristics.

ling, when you have lost sight of the ripple, they have already begun to deteriorate ; but I fancy this is true, in a degree, of all fish, and that we of the great towns, *believe* we eat salmon and turbot and red mullet, but are hugely mistaken.

By the way, the Walloons have a mode of cooking fish, called “à la seaviche,” which is worth noting down. It is a form of pickling which renders all the bones gelatinous, and is therefore very applicable to fresh-water fish, of all kinds. My wife shall put it on paper for your chef, and you can try it on the first pike that comes out of your Castle Ashby waters ; but my wife is sulky just now. How many new dogs has she had, forsooth ? When I read that query in your letter, Tiny was caught up in her arms and smothered with hugs and indignation, and then he put in a protest of his own, which is peculiar to him : he slipped down on his mistress’s lap, wriggled on to his back, twinkled fifty little paws in the air, and showed in the midst of them, a small, black, laughing face. This is his fashion of announcing that he is alive and kicking.

Oh, to be sure, he went fishing too, and he’s a trump of a dog—only his country life

is too exciting for him. The goat exasperates him, the fowls drive him crazy, the pigeons make him hysterical, and the cats of the neighbourhood disturb his very dreams. To see him flirting or frisking round our own great Angora cat, is as good as a play. She is as big as a tiger-cat, and as fierce as a panther; but nothing daunts him. He nibbles her whiskers, he catches her tail, he scampers off triumphantly with a mouthful of fur, till at last she becomes infected with his fun, and then who's uppermost and who's undermost no one can say, nor what's here nor what's there.

Toy terriers have a vivacity that is really delightful in itself. Tiny ought to send some civil message to Play, but he does not suggest any. He has no manners at all—he's too small, is Tiny. Pray excuse him.

June 12, 1872.

MY DEAR MADAM,

When I put my cat in the bag I generally leave out the kittens. I have sent one of them to your town address to-day. His name is Old Nick . . . Culpepper, and he is a mouser amongst herbs.

To drop the figures (figures always end

by tripping you up, if you don't drop them), Culpepper is the only herbalist I possess, in a portable shape. Old Nick is egregiously absurd, but you may find him the more amusing on that account. I am very fond of him, myself. I had a dear old mother once (she tarried with me till the ripe age of eighty-nine, and died in this foreign land for my sake) who had implicit faith in his system, treating all my own infantine ailments in accordance therewith. I have still the flavour on my palate of the decoctions of docks and darnels, of wormwood shoots and camomile flowers, of rue from the garden and hyssop from the wall ; and I see still, along the shelves of the kitchen dresser, all the little bundles of dry and dusty herbs, gathered by those dear maternal hands in the Enfield meadows.

What I mostly gathered, myself, in Enfield meadows (being a pickle) were coughs and colds, and I shan't forget, à propos of one of the former, how a grievous deception was palmed off on me, and how I swallowed a dish of boiled snails, believing they were stewed oysters. I have never been able to eat oysters since ; I always fancy they are snails.

Pray keep Culpepper as long as you please, and try all his remedies on your ailing country-folk, if you are so disposed. I do not think the experiments would be dangerous ; at all events, I survived them.

My wife (who has slept off her sulkiness) sends remorseful remembrances, and I am, dear Madam,

Yours, as ever, faithfully.

November 24, 1872.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

The Virginia Creeper is exquisite, and I am very hungry to have it, and thank you much for your kind thought of me—only, I fear I might not be able to strike it at this season. Should I not have a better chance in the spring, with a hot-bed and frame at hand? The variegated variety of course you know. It is delicate and pretty, but takes no rich colours like these.

The variegated thyme is also charming, and must make pretty borders—are these both English inventions, crosses from the old kinds? There is a little oak-leaf geranium that has just verbenascent—I think they call it *citronida*.

M. B. has sent me a Cameron-Tennyson

photograph. As a photograph it is very powerful, but, oh dear! how grim it is! It is like turning a great A upside down so: V—Viper? No—Vicious? *I should say so.* When I look at him he growls, when I take him up he snaps at me.

But let him! Shame on me for my jests! We agreed—did we not?—that he is our great Chief Poet, and that he is like the gate of Camelot? “For there was no gate like it under heaven.” And that he built Camelot for us—Camelot the “dim, rich city,” with its King, its Excalibur, and its Dreams? “He built it to the music of his harp.”

“And, like enow,
He is building still, seeing the city’s built
To music—therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever.”

I am naturally pert on paper. Turn my arms against me, if you will, and insinuate that, being W., I am twice as Vicious as anybody else.

So (Mr. Story) denies the musicalness of A.’s blank verse! . . . Ah! . . .

Of course any thesis may be supported, and, to a certain extent, justified, by a clever man who does not shrink from a little harm-

less insincerity of manipulation—a suppression here, an adverse illustration there, and surely Mr. Story *must* have been a little insincere.

Look at “The Lotus-eaters,” for if it is a question of the want of musical ear, the charge includes the whole of A.’s poetry, and not his blank verse alone.

I know of no poem that reminds me more of the roll and swell and reverberation of a church organ than the “Morte d’Arthur.” To me, it is the grandest music, from first to last. If you were Fine-Ear’s Sister, I would ask leave to read it to you—you, sitting among those cypresses, your hand, shell-shaped, behind your ear, and for chorus a faint wail of the wind outside from waste places beyond. Then you should hear me “mouth out my hollow A’s and O’s”—

“Deep-chested music, and to one result”—

for I do believe I could whirl Excalibur “slick” through the American notion. Yes, I do.

If I had been present when that theory was aired, and if my opinion had been asked, I believe I should have replied—wool-gathering—

“I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.”

Or I should have sprung up in a passion,
and startled the party out of their wits with,

“Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted!”

I admire your faithfulness to F. T. I respect it sincerely, and will not say another word to clash with it. The passage you cite deserves the praise you give it—only I can't help wishing that “rosy” and “rose” had been farther apart.

There! . . . I'm forsworn already! “Tired” has met with the greatest success—as it deserved to do so. It is very terse and pathetic, and the union of those two quotations in a sonnet is a triumph—I delight in it.

I tried Morris again the other day. He is clever, very—as an improvisatore, but wants relief and variety, as all improvisadores do. In his wheat-field the ears are all of the same height; there are hills on his horizon, but they are equally round-shouldered—no *one* stands out in prominence. The first ten minutes he is agreeable, the second you have a beginning of fidgets, the third you break away. Have not I said all this before? or have not you?

Tiny's little senseless compliments. Never send him your respects, he is quite unworthy of respect. He reminds me of the baby that was born old and grew younger every day, till he ended by cutting his teeth at an advanced age. Tiny came to us with a certain measure of senses. Now he is sixty puppies rolled in one, and he is perpetually cutting his teeth from head to tail.

My "Opus Magnum" is going into a second edition. It has taken its time, I have effected several expulsions and one substitution in it.

As for Browning, what shall I say? It is a puzzle and a perplexity to me, that question. What is there in the age that so warps genius and twists and turns men's minds from their original bent? Is it an abuse of the mental strain and stress? No, Browning *was* a poet in his youth, even a great poet, to my thinking. Have you his earlier works? Take down "Luria," read "Pippa Passes," read "Colombe's Birthday." They are full of a rich, vigorous, virile poetry—a poetry that reminds you somewhat of our Elizabethan dramatists—and that you would say could not fail to culminate gloriously with the years. They

all gravitate upwards. A little coarseness, perhaps, some over plain speaking, but nothing small, or mean, or feeble. Nothing indicative of tendencies such as the writer is displaying.

Do you remember Mrs. Browning's declaration in one of her letters, that she *went down on her knees to "Pippa Passes"*? The expression is scarcely an exaggerated one. Is there any poem that turns on a more divinely beautiful idea than that, or one that is evolved with such a rosy, luxuriant flush and freshness of colour, or with greater dramatic strength? On my honour, if I were asked to single out the finest and most original poem of the age, I think I should choose "Pippa Passes."

I have only read half "Middlemarch." Your definition of it, that it is all like the middle of March, is a very happy one and conveys exactly my own feeling respecting it. I suspect the defect of Miss Evans's organisation is the want of cheerfulness, a defect that is of course greatly aggravated by the absence of religious faith. Still, she stands alone, overtopping all other novelists of the day by many heads and many shoulders. I respect her as a great artist, though she does

not draw one to her, as a woman of her genius should.

How are the pugs? I believe you have had anguish with your pugs. They seem difficult to rear, which one would not infer from their sturdy build. Have these infant pug-nacities any affinity to Play, of whom my recollection is as vivid as ever? I suppose you have not a portrait of him in that peculiar coiffure, that so set off his black muzzle?

Tiny, I am sorry to say, is beginning to be a Feature of our establishment. I do not know which is the greater—his conceit or his ignorance. The fact is, he is so small, he only sees half the world. When I am tired of reading, I tuck him under my arm and pace up and down the room with him. It opens his mind. He peers out of the window and takes notes. He squints at himself in the glass and snarls, then recognises himself and smiles. He takes stock of everything that is on the table and discovers cakes. . . . Goodness! What an open-minded dog he is then!

One of his little accomplishments is to let us know that dinner is ready. He runs all over the house and hunts us together. At

times, in discharge of this duty, he tumbles head over heels down stairs, and gets up at the bottom with a dazed countenance. But that he is used to. Unlike the other toy terriers, he is very much beloved by all the maids, a pleasant circumstance, but fattening. On the whole I should be sorry to lose him, though he makes a slave of his mistress, and has not a shadow of respect for me.

January 7, 1873.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

One of the most striking and depressing features of those spirit-rapping absurdities is the way in which the minds of even distinguished people get warped under their influence. For instance, an old friend of mine, Dr. W., who was making himself notorious in the spiritual movement some years since, and who is a man of remarkable mind and elevation outside that circle, once told me that spirits had brought him into communication with a deceased aunt of his, and that she assured him she was rising, physically and intellectually, in the scale of existence; that her sight especially was improved, and that she hoped soon to be able . . . *to do without spectacles.*

This he repeated with the utmost gravity, and was shocked, no doubt, at my irreverent way of receiving the story. But . . . a disembodied spirit in spectacles ; the idea was too ludicrous. He sent me afterwards some metrical lines, dictated to him, said he, by the spirit of a dear old mutual friend of ours. I tossed them into the fire. My friend wrote much better poetry in his life-time, and it is to be remarked, generally, that whatever poetry has been communicated to us in this way is invariably, to use a sailor's phrase, a sort of " six-water grog," though attached to the most illustrious names. This, however, would bear out my theory that the sensuous element is needful in poetry, and that the enforced absence of it accounts also for the poverty of devotional verse passion.

It is a pleasure to me to know what your opinion in this matter is, and that it is not other than it is ; but I had no doubt about it. It is no flattery to say that any matter requiring the test of Ithuriel's spear I should submit to you without hesitation.

It is the wreck of a man that writes this to you—a Gulliver that was in Lilliput last night, trampled over and pinned down by a multitude of mites and midges. We had

a Christmas-tree, and five-and-twenty golden heads pirouetting round it. My ears are still deafened with the silver treble of their shrieks and with their wild peals of laughter. How many I had on my shoulders at once is an arithmetical problem, much confused by the gettings-on on one side and the tumblings-off on the other. As for Tiny, fancy him playing slipper in a game of hunt the slipper, and enjoying it.

In the course of the evening I overheard two tragic whispers that amused me much. I must tell you that, being Twelfth Night, the cake had a bean in it, and whoever got the bean was to choose a king or queen, as the case might be. The whisperers were two cousins. Said the boy to the girl, a slim, fair creature of twelve, her curls heavy on her shoulders: "Aline, si tu es reine, je veux être roi." The girl glanced at him, *de haut en bas* with mutinous eyes, and shook her head. It so chanced that Aline *was* queen, and she chose for her king an English boy of the same age. Very pretty the pair looked, with their gold crowns on their heads and rosy faces under them; but, later on, said the boy cousin to the queen in a corner, his little face white, his teeth set, "Aline!

je ne te pardonnerai jamais !” And with such an air !

It is fagging work, but I would rather give fifty entertainments to children than one to grown-up folk. They enjoy themselves so thoroughly. Their laughter does one good. They are neither blasé nor critical. I am tired of grown-up folks. I am not a bit grown up myself. Absurd as it may seem, I am still only six, or thereabouts, in several corners of my heart, and I am happy to say I have more than one friend I could name whom I suspect of being no older.

I have sent two more tiny notes to *N.* and *Q.* One on the Stackhouse question hitting the right nail on the head, I think ; the other on Izaak Walton, saying I have nothing to say. My doggy paper, I see, has not yet appeared.

Did I tell you I had a letter from Esmeralda addressed to “ Mr. Westwood Poet, Brussels.” Bless the child, where *was* she riz ? She seems to suffer from a curse of professoriness, as Professors swarm on her letter-pages as do blackberries on a bush ; but how much nicer the blackberries would be ! How is it that a quick-witted girl in Delaware County, thousands of miles over-sea, does not divine

that a lecture by Professor Floyed L. Buckwen, of Nipisaguit (subject unknown) can have no special interest for "T. Westwood, Poet, Brussels"? She sends some American leaves as specimens of vividness of colour, but it seems to me your Virginia creeper beats them hollow—judge; but perhaps they were gathered by Professors! or perhaps the thousand miles of sea have disenchanted them.

We have a haunted house close at hand. I knew the late owner of it—*he* was a Professor—and he had an apartment to let. For five-and-twenty years that apartment was never occupied for more than two days at a time. It was let again and again, but no sooner had the occupant taken possession than an irresistible impulsion drove him downstairs and out of the door. There was something wrong with the Professor; he was a living skeleton, with an anxious, haggard, hatchet-face. He had a wife and child. The wife died first, then the child, and at last the Professor died too, and now the cobwebs are covering the windows and the rank grass is overgrowing the threshold; but still at the fanlight over the door is the old, persistent *affiche*, 'Appartement à louer, presentemente.'

I remember going once to see the apartment myself. The Professor showed it me, laying down many restrictions and conditions of an unusual kind. He gave me the impression that he did not wish me to take it, and the wish was mutual. I stayed but a few minutes, and felt I *could not* stay longer. All the time we were talking a wish was possessing me to turn and bolt. I thought he scrutinised my face curiously, and I fancied that each moment we sat there I could see him growing thinner and yellower and haggarder. I ended by stammering that I did not think it would do ; and I seem to remember descending the staircase *quatre-à-quatre*, and hearing a weird, rattle-snake laughter as I closed the door.

Now the Professor is gone I mean some day to go and see the house again.

Ever, dear Lady Alwyne,

Sincerely yours,

T. WESTWOOD.

II

February 5, 1873.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

Your picture of that little undraped hero is charming, and the *dénouement* of the scene delicious. You have a peculiar faculty of relating anecdotes that I envy, and of which I am entirely devoid. I never can turn the corners in my stories unawkwardly. I remember being reproached for my corners by old Bridget Elia, after putting blushing into her hands my first narrative poem — a rhodomontade about Richard Cœur de Lion, with brusque transitions unaccounted for. My corners bother me to this day. If I could turn my corners, I would write a ghost-story in three volumes, without a *dénouement*. I would lead my readers up to the extreme verge of an inexpressible and inconceivable horror, and there leave them—their mouths gaping, their eyes all whites.

I have tied up my own ghost-stories, corners and all, into a bundle for *N. and Q.* I told Dr. D., in sending it, that, like King Arthur when he took his ticket for Avilion—

“All my mind was clouded with a doubt”—

(otherwise he would have taken a return, I suppose), and that perhaps he had better keep the bundle for a Christmas number if he used it at all.

In the meantime, I will make a copy of the MS. for your special use in the mullioned window—with the proviso that you are not to be taken in by my tales, for though my imagination leans to belief in this matter of ghosts, my reason puts in a veto—*In what I have believed, I have been deceived*—that is my summing-up.

There is a bold bird in *N. and Q.* who avows his absolute belief in ghosts; but his brains must be shaky, for the narrative that follows his avowal is of a most bemuddled description. I do not know the Berkeley Square story, beyond vague allusions to it in *N. and Q.* Pray let me have it, when you write next, and that *next* may be *soon*. I have an idea of getting somebody in the precincts of Castle Ashby—the sexton, for

instance—to make all the stops in the new organ full stops!

I hold by the real, even in poetry. I hold that, from the standpoint of the real alone, the poet can attain to divine altitudes and a consummate sovereignty. It is the absence of the real that has lessened Byron's fame. It is the endurance and vitality of it that make Chaucer and Shakespeare as fresh and dominant now as when they trod the earth.

What a noble passage is that of Mrs. Browning's in her review of the "Book of the Poets," when speaking of Chaucer: "He knew the secret of nature and art—that truth is beauty—and, saying, 'I will make a "Wife of Bath" as well as "Emilie," and you shall remember her as long.' We *do* remember her as long. And he sent us a train of pilgrims, each with a distinct individuality apart from the pilgrimage, all the way from Southwark and the Tabard Inn to Canterbury and Becket's shrine. And their laughter comes never to an end, and their talk goes on with the stars, and all the railroads which may intersect the spoilt earth for ever cannot hush the tramp, tramp of their horses' feet." Now there is no "tramp, tramp" in "The Lover's Tale." There is

nothing real or audible or tangible in it, and I doubt whether even youths of nineteen will care to read it twice in these matter-of-fact days, when moonshine is no more in fashion.

It is remarkable to observe how completely Tennyson, as his mind matured, shook off his old defect of redundancy.

The "Golden Supper," though not one of his best works, is striking for the austere abstemiousness of its style—for the total absence of expletives. When he became real he became strong. When he dropped out of his moonshine he struck his tap-roots in solid ground. No more "Airy, fairy Lilian." No more gossamer trifling. He set his genius to its work, and became year by year the greatest poetic artist, to my thinking, that England has seen.

But enough, and too much, of my expletives. Forgive them, and

Believe me always, Dear Lady Alwyne,
Yours very sincerely.

Yes, we see the garden now and then. One of the last times we gathered in it violets and China roses, and new-laid eggs. It is true the violets were but peaking, and the China roses soon tumbled to pieces, but

the new-laid eggs were delicious. I wish I could send you some in an omelet.

The wife and I are beginning to stand tip-toe, trying to look over the grim shoulders of Winter, and see the Baby, Spring, that rosiest-cheeked baby in all the world, whose little finger-tips sprout into pinky daisies, and whose every hair will turn into a blade of emerald grass, by a metamorphosis unsung of Ovid.

Just now, Winter's shoulders are less square than usual, and there are fewer icicles in his beard. Presently the Babe will crow.

I have not seen the poem yet, Tennyson's "Epilogue" to his "Idylls," my copy of the Library Edition being still in the limbo of the London binders. Such epilogues, however, can have no particular attraction. I should have liked a prologue and epilogue, partly Arthurian.

Tiny's in high spirits; he tears up a red blanket and a highly decorated feather-bed (his own) daily in the exuberance of his mirth, and, when he meets the cat, dances a saraband round her till she looks like a spit-fire in the midst, and ends by boxing his ears.

I wish I could send the doggie to you in

a sample-box to have some fun with the pugs, though his extreme vivacity might bewilder their juvenile wits, and make their tails curl the wrong way. Have their tails a *very* stiff curl, your pugs? Could you wear the pets as earrings? Tiny's not a dog to be known in a day. We have had him now a year or more, and are only *beginning* to fathom all the depths of his character, for there *are* depths in doggery. Yea, and lower deeps in the lowest, though the possessor of them may be squeezeable into a pint pot, or holdable in the hollow of your hand. Mrs. Browning's projected treatise on canine psychology was left unwritten, and I should like to take it up if only my strength were equal to the vastness of the topic.

. . . Hereupon Tiny (on my knee) laughs from ear to ear, and, wriggling on his back, twinkles fifty little feet in my face, having detected an odour of buttered toast on its way up the stair. Great crimes sit lightly, I am sorry to say, on his moral sense. Yesterday he became an assassin. We had put a sick ortolan in a nest of lamb's-wool on the rug before the fire, and, finding himself alone with the bird, and feeling jolly,

he rolled it out of its nest, and went on rolling it till he had rolled it dead. You should have seen the satisfaction of his countenance when the deed was done. As soon as he saw *us* he rolled the corpse again.

But enough of this folly, or you will despise me utterly. I think I confessed to you that I was still "sixes and sevens" at times in the matter of my age.

Do you see that old-fashioned print, *Chambers' Journal*? If not, I recommend No. 458, October 5, 1872, as containing a funny little poem, not in the Norse but Nurse dialect. It is certainly worth 1½*d.* in itself. I have got Stackhouse, 1st edition. Old man in mantle, elephant, camel, and all; eighteen shillingworth of theology; weight, a hundredweight and a half.

Now for my ghosts. Adieu, dear Lady Alwyne.

September 25, 1873.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

How welcome you were! and how we gladdened to see you again! We were sitting on the lawn, and all you said to us harmonised charmingly with the surrounding scene—an evening sky full of rosy light,

blue spirals of smoke from cottage chimneys melting into the black background of forest, and, far away down the valley, a shimmer of mist from marsh and Moated Grange beyond.

At such a moment, when you pressed us so kindly and cordially to come and see you at Castle Ashby, of course we said we would, and so indeed *will* we on our next visit to England; but it cannot be this year. Yet a few days, and my Philistine will be upon me, a triple horde of Philistines on *me*, who am no Samson, though my enemies might insinuate that the jawbone of an ass is, at all events, not wanting.

My Philistines are the shareholders of our railways, who in April and October make irruption into our offices, hungry for cash, and trample roughshod on your humble servant. This militant state of things lasts a month or six weeks, but brings the winter to our doors, and I should like to see Castle Ashby in all its summer glory.

I am glad you are going to take up with old flowers, the dear, old-fashioned, disused things! they are worth all the rest. The new flowers dazzle and amaze and delight us, the old ones have their roots in our

hearts. There are so many that have passed out of sight! The other day I could have gone down on my knees and hugged a bush of lavender. I had not seen such a thing for twenty years, and straightway there sprang up a vision of the garden of my boyhood, and I smelt all the old scents and revelled in the old blooms.

One of the most remarkable gardens, for perennial plants, is that of the Rev. H. N. Ellacombe, the Vicar of Bitton. I fancy all the ancients are to be found in it. I saw an interesting account of this garden recently in some paper, but I forget which. He is a correspondent of mine, being an angler and angling-book collector, and I was to have made his personal acquaintance and that of his perennial papa this year in Brussels, but some hindrance sprang up.

I was rather afraid of his papa, having an impression I should never get out of belfries, or from the sound of bells, as long as he stayed. The Belgian carillons have almost all lapsed into silence; the age has grown too matter-of-fact for them. To me they were delightful. At Bruges or Antwerp you woke up in the middle of the night, and heard that silvery chiming high up in air

as if a gate of heaven had opened to let it out. The Antwerp carillon still exists. I have often seen it played by an individual in a high state of perspiration, no coat, bare arms, tugging, hauling, jumping. I never witnessed such a gymnastic performance. The *modus operandi* was in startling contrast with the result as heard from below, which gave you an idea of a mechanism like that of a musical-box, a spring pushed now and then to change the tune, the rest mere wheels and pegs.

Alas! the summer is waning fast away, and has been shortened by untoward weather. For many weeks we scarcely saw the sun, and were beaten with winds and drenched with rains. Nevertheless, my garden, in its small way, was a sight, and brought all the Boitsfort neighbours to see it, and it is even now full of colour. The natives here have no idea of keeping up gardens in our English style, so mine seemed a marvel to them, though really a very ordinary piece of work. Amongst the things that succeeded best with me were the new varieties of clematis and zinnias.

Amongst red geraniums, do you know a little perfect thing called "Henri Loriet"?

Jovial would be a fitter name, such a cheery, exuberant little thing it is. The variegated thyme thrives well with me; but will it stand the winter in the open ground?

Tiny is flourishing, though rather put out at this moment by the loss of his cat. He had a frolicksome and friendly cat, the companion of his leisure, and co-partner in his basket and bed. This cat, through erratic propensities, or, for the furtherance of veal-pies, has vanished, and Tiny is constantly on the sniff for her. But his spirits are always good. He lies on his back and laughs as hard as ever, and he hunts the goats and harries the fowls with his old pertinacity. He and your deer-hound would make a pretty pair in leash.

"Aftermath" I have not seen, and, having no hopes of it, I let it pass. When Longfellow began versifying the New Testament, it was clear his reign was over, and a long and prosperous reign it was. He attained one great thing, universal popularity. No one turned him the cold shoulder. His vigour, as you say, was never extreme, but it sufficed for his accomplishment; he was tender and eminently picturesque.

'Hyperion' is full of charming things, and

many of his lyrics will keep their hold of us, I think. He was a loveable poet, at least, and, in these days of dearth, one regrets him. I perceive I treat him as a bygone, but such he really is.

Notes and Queries? very dull indeed. The editor made a hash of my ghost stories, by printing the last first.

This is a dull letter, I fear *stupidly* dull. I will write again very soon.

November 8, 1873.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

A pleasant letter, and good news! We were delighted. I did not like to think of you, in however temporary a sense, as an invalid. Your life seems to me so essentially active and expansive—so opposed to being shut up and crippled within four walls. I know nothing of Bournemouth, but the name sounds pleasantly, and so does your description of it, and I shall have a friendly feeling to the place henceforth. Our England is very comprehensive, is it not? How many nooks there are in it, that replace efficiently the far-away South, and are exempt from the discomforts of that sunny purgatory!

Writing to my friend Mr. Ellacombe yesterday, I copied your crocus passage, with a "please dig me up anything special, in your parts, if such there be." I know Bitton is not Krim Tartary—but it is thereabouts, if I may judge by the extraordinary quizzes, aborigines of that locality, that the Rev. E. has sent me here. Tartars must be quite as presentable—more Krim, but less grim. For my own part, I knew as little of crocuses as you did yourself, but my wife has a maiden aunt who is a profound botanist, and I will pump her too on the subject. I have an affection for this flower, as I have for all those that I used to buy with my odd twopences when I was a wee boy. And I have an immense affection, too, for an old gardening book by Abercrombie, with a gardener in a white apron, spading away, in a frontispiece. I met with the book the other day, and hugged it. The older I grow, the more I love everything I have left so far behind; but it is a yearning, sorrowful sort of love.

"Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore!'" To think that we should only wholly and utterly realise the blessedness of youth, when our

hair is grey. What a mistake is the so-called "prime of life"! The true prime is the dawn. Muscular development and strength of reason—what are these compared with the freshness of the heart, the perfume, the divineness, the "light that never shone on sea or shore," of that early time?

When we leave off being young we begin to die. We grow nearer the stars in stature, and see them more dimly. We widen the circle of our desires and pleasures, and narrow the sphere of our enjoyments. Ah, yes, you reply, or some one replies for you; but, having seen the vanity of all things here, we . . . aspire.

When it is so, well, but—it is not always so.

Thirty thousand barks like brad-awls in my ear—that's Tiny, informing me that his mistress has got her bonnet on, and that I'm to make calls with her. Oh, dear old Abercrombie, in the white apron, I never made calls when you were my oracle in my "prime of life"!

Good-bye, dear Lady Alwyne. These are only how d'ye do's, genuflexions to your shoe-tie. There shall be more anon.

With my wife's best remembrances, and
an assortment of brad-awls from Tiny,
I am always sincerely yours.

November 25, 1873.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

I trust home-air has seconded the good influences of Bournemouth, and that you are feeling yourself again, and prepared to face the winter snows that are gathering, gathering, gathering.

Do you remember the time when snow was a mystery to you? When you used to stand at the darkened window watching it with a puzzled and solemn face? Was it the plucking of geese to you in upper air? or was it the dropping of down from the pinions of child-angels? A tender thing is snow, watched from a window—and we know what it is when it catches us on a bare upland, or in a choking gully. It has catty qualities; it is velvet-pawed and iron-clawed—a traitor-element; lovely on the fir boughs in the crisp, frosty morning; fatal, deluding, devilish, when there is an east wind howling and all the Walpurgis witches are abroad.

I have had more than one battle with the snow in the wild Ardennes country, and

know what it is. Pleasant to my ears at such moments, I remember, was the cling-clang from old village belfries, clashing out through the night for the help of way-farers.

The Ardennes country, by the way, is as traitorous as the snow—it blows hot and cold there in the same breath. Now you are in Siberia, now in the Hesperides; now you start a partridge, and now you meet a wolf. But the landscape has a fresh, vigorous colour and savour, and, if you do not know it already, would be worth your visiting when the opportunity serves.

I once passed a winter, with my wife's family in an old château amongst the hills in that district, and saw its wilder aspects in perfection. We had not a neighbour within five miles of us. The Meuse washed the foot of the rocks below us, and above it towered the gaunt wreck of a castle called Poilvache. Of the view in front of us there was no end, and there were sunrises and sunsets, in the clear frosty weather that I hold in my memory yet. As a special phase of living, it was a pleasant experience enough.

Will you disown my acquaintance if I confess that I rather like Rhoda Broughton's

books? Of course, as morals, they are nought. I know what their faults are, but they have a fresh vigour and cleverness not common in these days, and they are not wholly material. Are they Anathema ~~Maledicta~~ to you? Do not mind saying so, if they are. I had another query to put, which was this—Do you know and like Jansenist bindings? It is a favourite style of mine, simple and severe, and pleasant to the touch. This is only another genuflexion. I am in a bowing mood.

Ever, dear Lady Alwyne,
Sincerely yours.

January 9, 1874.

You have heard, no doubt, that there has been uncivil war between Freshwater and Brussels? Indeed, did not Castle Ashby contribute a gun to the hostile battery? Few were the shot on my side, but vehement the firing on the other.

M.B.'s fiery indignation against the author of "Nancy" amused me. Of course, I don't defend her faults, which are many and rampant. She is neither reverent enough nor reticent enough, but I find in

her books what I delight in—freshness and youth, and fun and happy laughter—all of which I take to be blessed things. Those are gift-horses, into the mouths of which I abstain from looking, on principle—they are so rare.

Admit, too, that Rhoda Broughton has a most felicitous faculty of natural description. All the descriptive passages in “Nancy” are wonderfully true, and vigorous and graphic.

What did you think of the Browning correspondence in the *Contemporary*? It seems to be considered a failure, and the reason is patent enough to my thinking. Horne has bemuddled it. Was there ever anything so *jumbly* as his running commentary?

The poor man has mislaid half the links of the correspondence, and all the while he potters, you feel he is groping for them, turning his pockets inside out, ransacking his drawers, and losing the thread of his ideas.

What do you think of the tact of the man as shown in his proposition to E. B. B.—(to E. B. B. of all women in the world—nun in her cell, saint in her shrine) to sign the

petition for the abolition of the patent of the great theatres?

Never were knuckles more righteously rapped than his by her refusal. She greatly overrated him; however, she was unduly influenced by a sense of service rendered—to her, who needed no such service—for what editor under the sun would have refused to publish “Margret” in his magazine? She saw him through the haze of a grateful sentiment, and saw him magnified far beyond his natural size. On her recommendation I purchased several of his books, but never could climb up to half the altitude of her appreciation of them. “Orion” is not amiss, but it remains a “farthing” epic. At half a crown it failed.

No, these letters have been given in too piece-meal a fashion; they should have been made parts of a whole. Some slight kind of biographical framework should have held them together—something to give them coherence. I must add that I have not seen the second instalment. I shrank from sending for it—there was something in the first that was rather painful to me—a sort of desecration; I am quite sure you will understand my feeling.

Have you read Miss Thackeray's "Spinsters and Toilers"? There is a delightful warmth of heart in it, as in everything she writes. It will not increase her reputation, but it will make those who loved her already love her more.

I was glad to learn that Smith and Elder had offered to reprint M. B.'s tales, with a slight profit to herself. Groves of B. and Macmillan offered her nothing. *I don't care about Groves of B.*

Forgive this rubbish, dear Lady Alwyne, and believe me,

Always very sincerely yours.

Your letter, dear Lady Alwyne, was welcome—not as flowers in May, but as flowers in January. Will there be any more flowers in January, I wonder?

Delightful, the Tennyson anecdote. Oh! but you may perfectly well send it to Freshwater, for not only is there nothing spiteful in it, but it is precisely in Freshwater that all the Tennysonian scandal (spiteful enough that!) is hatched. Such things I have heard! Such incredible and inconceivable things! Such manifestly *unjust* and *impossible* things,

let me add--a hissing of ganders on the one hand, and on the other--

"So all day long the noise of battle rolled
Among the mountains, by the winter sea," etc.

Yes, when the hissing is too strong for me I tramp about the room, spouting *that*, just as you might drown a discord among your choristers with a grand roll and reverberation of your organ.

Did you get the Browning letters, the first instalment? Before sending the paper I looked over it again, and it made my ears buzz, as before. Was there ever anything so inadequate, so uncongenial?

And what an absurd old idiot Horne is, and how he continually harps on himself, and on his aspirations and hopes and whooping-coughs of thirty-five years ago! Don't you hear him whoop at every pause of his discourse? And don't you feel he ought to be ashamed of himself, at his age?

The letters are without interest, because without continuity--and, in fact, you can scarcely catch the utterance of them, through the eternal piping of that trumpety horn. To me, it is a most vexatious and exasperating affair.

We are no longer in the downs. We even got as far as the country garden yesterday, and found the air laden with violet odours and the clematis plants in bud. And the sky was blue as in May, and the grass quite velvety. And didn't we long to stay—to be rid of the unwholesome town, to stay and watch the unfolding and awakening of all our Sleeping Beauties on bed and shrubbery! We came home rich in a bunch of violets and a dozen of fresh eggs—good things, both, it seems to me, in this wicked world.

I trust your cold is better. How very injudicious of you to take it back, after experience of its uncivil behaviour to you! Pray encourage it as little as you can, for colds this winter are not ordinary colds, but have long tap-roots—or, as Lamb said of the household gods, “have a terrible fixed foot.”

I met with a clever simile this morning in an American book. Talking to a dull, slow person, after conversing with a loquacious, jerky-minded one, is like taking a cat on your lap after holding a squirrel. That is the sense of it, but not the precise words.

December 15, 1874.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

How the weeks chase the months, and how the months rush to the year-post! . . .

Which means that if the idlest man in the world had to be hanged, where should *I* hide myself?

Pray forgive me—I am at your feet, abased and penitent.

Not that I should have waited so long to write, had I not heard that all was well with you. Summer is a demoralising season to me. I fritter away my time all through it amongst pots and plants and composts, oblivious of duties—even of those that are pleasures, too.

But not oblivious of my friends. . . . Oh no! . . .

Do you know a book called “Evenings in Arcadia,” by one Dennis? Not a *remarkable* book, but readable and pleasant—a sort of poetical Decameron, in which a trio of friends discuss the poets. One of the discussions turns on the inutility of second-rate poets.

Ruskin declares that none but first-rate poetry should be tolerated, that all else is a

nuisance and an encumbrance. In the "Arcadia" something is said on the other side of the question, but neither Darwin nor Ruskin seem to apprehend the philosophic fact that is at the root of inferior verse, and of inferior literature, generally—the fact that the large majority of mankind have an inferior mental status, and require a literature of their own calibre. Suppress the small poets and the namby-pamby novelists, and you would have an enormous population, hungry and angry, robbed of the only pabulum that can meet their needs. *Why* has Tupper a larger circulation than Tennyson? *Why* does Mrs. Wood outsell George Eliot? These are queries which only a dogmatist, judging and appreciating from his own personal elevation and point of view, could overlook.

On the same principle, I suppose, Ruskin would suppress cock-sparrows, magpies, or other unmusical fowl, and keep the woods sacred to merles, mavies, and nightingales alone. Nay, he might push his theory further, and, having suppressed the mental food of the shallow-witted classes, might preach the suppression of the shallow-witted themselves, as a logical corollary.

Oh, the charming world, with perpetual Ruskinism, and a surfeit of nightingales, for the crown of things! Should not we stuff our fingers in our ears, and moan dismally Mrs. Browning's refrain:

"Those nightingales, those nightingales."

Of all one-sided things, commend me to dogmatism.

M. B. has been picking crows with me—spiritist crows and photographic crows. I objected to any picking on the former score. Spiritism is a "pièceuvre," it fixes its tentacles on you and sucks you in. I am afraid M. B. is being sucked in very fast by it. At all events, her spiritish proclivities are too decided to render discussion of any avail. She wished me to study Crookes and De Morgan and heaven knows whom, but I declined, seeing no good in it. Who shall say that your Crookeses and De Morgans did not sit down to the study with sane minds, and rise from it *in*-sane? Such cases are frequent. Mrs. Crowe studied ghosts, and ended by walking the streets in a costume that—was not that of the day (you may remember the incident); and I knew a doctor that went in for the analysis of diseased organs, and that

died of a diseased organ soon after. "Is it a duty," asks a sensible writer in a recent *Cornhill*, "to examine into these so-called spiritual demonstrations?" and he decides that it is *not*, as long as they are mere puerilities and futilities—outrages to our common sense and insults to our sense of reverence. Whether you regard it from the Theistic or Pantheistic point of view, there is a dignity in the world's government that is at variance with the mountebank madness of Spiritism, its gulls and its quackeries.

By the way, you know Frederick Tennyson's delusions on the subject. Unawares, a key to the mystery was given me the other day. It appears that the poor fellow has been a martyr to *insomnia* for years past.

The photographic crow I *did* pick in a measure. M. B. pretends that photography is one of the upper arts. I maintain that it is merely a natural process, struggling to *become* an art; that it is full of defects and shortcomings in its present stage, and is made up of distortions and exaggerations; that in portraiture it is apt to give the worst instead of the best expression; that in land-

scape it is unfaithful to the foregrounds and washy in the backgrounds ; that it copies engravings well and pictures badly, falsifying the colours ; that it is only truthful on the flat, and that it is the dire enemy of our feet and hands and noses.

M. B. swears by Mrs. Cameron ; so do I, to a certain extent, but not wholly. I like Mrs. Cameron's simpler work, her more ambitious less. . . . Some of the portraits are fine. Little Maggie Thackeray is a delight to me, Beatrice Cenci is good too, and there is a certain artistic tone about Mrs. Cameron's photos generally that arrests one's attention. After all, my greatest grudge against photography is that it has suppressed engraving, and that print-shops that used to be full of beautiful things swarm now with dingy photos alone.

When I last heard from M. B. she was in great sorrow, having lost an old and faithful friend. Alas ! the joy-bells chime us *up* the hill of life, and the death-bells toll us *down* it. Worse than dying ourselves is that dying of old friends. As long as we hold them we hold our youth and prime—we are men. The closing of their graves leaves us mere dry husks and sapless trunks.

And now may I appeal to your generosity for a letter, for on your justice I have no claim?

January 15, 1875.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

I was relieved to find you back at Castle Ashby. Those empty houses—empty of life and of love—are sore trials. I said I could sympathise with your bereavement. When I came over to settle here in '48, I had a dear old mother of my own—a brave-hearted old mother, for though already advanced in years (past her seventieth year), she left her old home, and all her old world of ways and habits, to follow me.

I shall never forget that flitting of ours. It was bitter, bad winter weather. A night passage; dark, creaky ladders descending to the steamer; the sea Arctic-keen; sheaths of ice round the harbour piles; and when we got to Brussels we could not find our lodgings, and were beset with tribulations of all kinds. And she was pluckiness itself through them all—I believe the pluckier of the two.

Well, virtue was its own reward. She had

been a delicate, ailing woman all her years, but she grew blithe and bonny in the new air. She took such a hold of life, indeed, that she remained a blessing in our home until quite recently, and it was only on the New Year's morning of her *ninetieth* year that she passed into the sleep God giveth His beloved. We were proud as well as fond of her. There is her empty chair, in front of me, and there is she on the wall, faithfully limned by my youngest "son," my Benjamin (you know I have several "sons"). "My eyes make pictures when they're shut," and shutting them now, I see my youngest son on the floor, cramping his long legs and taking my mother's portrait furtively, she, dear soul, spectacles on nose, deep in her *Times*, unconscious of the act. The result is charming; a slight sketch, but tenderly touched, better than all the photos. (Do you ever look at a photo, by the way, without feeling the iron poking at the back of your head?)

My mother's pluckiness went as far as this—she began the study of French in her eightieth year, and took a teacher. Never was there such a kicking against pricks, such a struggle with the inexorableness

of age and memory. We will not speak of the issue. Some of her translations were amusing. She had observed yellow bills in many of the windows, "*Maison à louer.*" "A strange combination of trades," quoth she quite gravely, "*mason and lawyer!*"

We keep her memory green. She is still a presence in the house. We do not need the ridiculous "spirits," with their twanging guitars and strumming accordeons, to call her up amongst us.

We chuckled over your séance, which was deliciously absurd. I am delighted to find those solemn pontiffs of spiritism, Crookes and Wallace, are just what a blind instinct persuaded me they must be.

The worst of this wretched movement is that it degrades our faith. If the demonstrations prove anything, they prove the decadence, the dwindling away of the soul, in its separate state. Dead great poets give us verses worthy of Moses & Son; brilliant talkers become Sairey Gamps. This world's art is that world's rubbish; and that world's music?—oh! . . . instead of the—

"Long sigh easing
The utmost heaviness of music's heart";

instead of—

“Rolling organ harmonies,
That swell and shake and fall”—

instead of “hundred-throated nightingales,” and songs of the morning star, and chants of the redeemed, *what do they give us?* Don't you hear the horrible strumming? Don't you hear the instrument banged on the floor, when the strumming is over? Good God! if this is all we come to when ashes have joined ashes, and dust dust, better the unbroken silence and the eternal sleep.

The lines I made use of above, the “Long sigh easing,” etc., you will have recognised as Browning's. Do not get a chill on purpose (please leave that “dirty village” to its devices), but the next time you are detained at home, and not infested by demons (*demons* mean *visitors* in our lingo) reread “Pippa Passes.” There is genius, with the bloom on it, in that poem. As his wife said, before she *was* his wife, “I go down on my knees to it.” Besides the grand dramatic power it displays, it is full of scattered beauty, description and otherwise. In Ottima and Sebald, for

instance :

"Buried in woods we lay, you recollect :
Swift ran the searching tempest overhead,
And ever and anon some bright, white shaft
Burnt thro' the pine-tree roof—here burnt and there
As if God's messenger, thro' the close wood screen,
Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture,
Feeling for guilty thee and me."

And Phene's first letter :

"Ah ! this that swam down like a first moonbeam
Into my world !"

And Luigi's description of Chiara :

"With her blue eyes upturned,
As if life were one long and sweet surprise."

And then, again, Luigi *loquitur* :

"I can give news of earth to all the dead
Who ask me: last year's sunsets and great stars ;
Those crescent moons, with notched and turning rims,
That strengthened into sharp fire, and there stood,
Impatient of the azure ; and that day
In March, a double rainbow stopped the storm ;
May's warm, slow, yellow moonlit summer night,—
Gone are they, but I have them in my soul !"

Do you not feel the balmy May moonlight
mellowing round you as you read ?

And there is often such felicity of expression, as when Pippa compares herself to Phene :

"A soft and easy life these ladies lead !
Whiteness in us were wonderful indeed.
Oh, save that brow its virgin dimness,
Keep that foot its lady primness,
Let those ancles never swerve
From their exquisite reserve,
Yet have to trip along the street like me,
All but naked to the knee."

What more exquisite than that "exquisite reserve"? The defect of the poem, I take it, is the mystic and recondite character of a great deal of what Pippa sings and says. The idea might have been worked out just as fully with more simplicity. Now and then the little *Deus ex machina* is charmingly and childishly roguish, as in the sunbeam passage :

"Ah ! you foolhardy sunbeam, caught
With a single splash of my ewer !
You that would mock the best pursuer,
Was my basin over-deep?
One splash of water ruins you asleep,
And up, up, fleet your brilliant bits,
Wheeling and counter-wheeling,
Reeling, broken beyond healing,
Now grow together on the ceiling ;
That will task your wits."

Shutting my eyes, I see all that. A small

boy lying in bed ; the maid comes into the room at getting-up time, splashes some water into the basin, and there are the brilliant bits—

“Wheeling and counter-wheeling,
Reeling, broken beyond healing.”

Now I'll get off my knees, and tell you that beside Tennyson's "innumerable bees" I place two lines from the "Morte d'Arthur," where the king asks Sir Bedivere what he has seen and heard, after throwing Excalibur into the lake, and Sir Bedivere replies :

“I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple, washing in the reeds.”

As suggestions of sound those lines seem to me perfection.

Some of the prettiest of my books are eighteenth-century French books that are not showable to a lady in detail. At this hour of the clock I hesitate to stigmatise them as immoral books, for from the eighteenth-century point of view they were scarcely so, and I fancy our great-grandmothers would not have blushed at being caught with a Lafontaine, or Dorat, or Gricourt in their hands. In our day they are not dangerous because, for the most

part, unreadable. Their only charm to me is in their illustration, and it is wholly and solely on that account there is such a present rage for them. The pretty plates and the rich, harmonious old bindings draw like loadstones.

Only fancy a Lafontaine, bound by Derome, being offered by Fontaine, of the Passage des Panoramas, for 11,600 frs. (£450), and two men rushing thither from different parts of Europe to buy it. I knew one of the men, the one that got in last, and . . . too late. Now the cream of the joke is in the fact that, ten years ago, this very book would have been considered dear at 100 frs.! Well, I wish I could show you even the outsides of them; their pretty jackets, by Lostic, and Capé, and Rapaclier, and many more. They would delight you, I am sure. I am going to ask my tame binder for some samples of marbled paper (and a notion of the prices of them), which I will send you. It will then be for your Northamptonshire artist to decide whether having them over is commercially possible or not. Here we rather long for London marbled papers.

Tiny would like the deer-hound. He

cottons to big dogs. Tiny is growing vituperative. When the lady's-maid comes to take him down at night, before tucking him into bed, he swears at her, *articulating*; you know that it is her eyes and limbs he is denouncing. He is like a child, and *hates* to go to bed. Also at that hour he is generally toasting his toes, which he does very judgmatically on the fender's edge. With a little pains one might teach him to tuck his tail between his hind-legs, and warm himself in the picturesque fashion of Englishmen.

He has assumed very despotic habits of late. He is no longer *our* dog. He is the master of the house, and we are *his* dogs. Henceforth Henry IV. on all fours with his little son on his shoulders is nothing to our ignominious positions when Tiny is bent on humiliating us. I am meditating a revolt, something in the easy Spanish fashion: Down with Tiny! Up with Boxer—Boxer being a mastiff, or St. Bernard, or Newfoundland, something immense and overpowering.

February 18, 1875.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

I have seen a good many precocious children in my day, and have always found

them unpleasant, out of harmony, full of morbid suggestions; but this Fritz Van der Kerckhow is an exception, especially now that his little pale face has passed into the shadow, and we have only his work before us. A wonderful work, surely! I have been to see it several times, and each time with increase of wonder. There is nothing infantine in it. It is a mature talent from the first; not a groping in the dark, but an attainment. Its suggestiveness is marvellous, and the way in which the child has mastered (intuitively it would seem) all the tricks and appliances of his art baffles you completely. The skies in these mites of pictures (such *great* pictures they are!) are peculiarly fine, full of a mysterious and subtle poetry. You carry away in your heart the greyness and glimmer of them as something precious.

The work, all through, is an attaching work. And the strangeness is that the child appears to have had but little direct commerce with nature. His inspiration came to him, for the most part, second-hand, through art.

There are two rumours afloat about the collection: one that the father will not

part with any item of it; the other that he is going to make over the whole to the Brussels National Collection. I will keep my ears open to what is going on, and will not lose a chance if such should present itself.

During the boy's life-time he gave away his pictures right and left, and many to poor people. Now that they have attained a value it is possible some of these necessitous owners may offer them for sale. None were sent to England that I am aware of.

How touching that story of yours about the Lord Northampton who was ambassador at Venice! How much more touching, I think, all such stories are when only partially told, gathered from letters, gleaned piece-meal among the litter and gloom of years! The pathos that *suggests* itself is so much more touching than the pathos that is *told*. Don't you think so? For instance, when you say, "Then he hears of her death, *and there is no letter from him after.*" How full that silence is of tears!

Well-a-day! The old tale comes never to an end. The Cold Hand wearies never of drawing young lives into the dark. We went the other day to see two poor children (orphan girls of sixteen and seventeen), both

of whom have felt the clasp of it. One of them an interesting creature, and beginning already to make herself a name and a fame as a musician. They are of Italian origin, and this girl's head is full of Italy, though she left it when quite a child. Was there anything she would like? Ah, yes! When she was little she used to eat cakes made of polenta, that were so nice. Could we send her some polenta? Luckily there is a little crooked shop in Brussels in which one finds many unexpected things, and polenta amongst them.

"Is it not strange," she added, "that I should remember so much of Italy? It seems to come nearer and nearer to me."

Poor little Gabrielle! She has been a pet in our circle for some years past. She is a thorough *Bohémienne* in every impulse and pulsation of her being, but original, many-sided, full of cleverness and fascination; not pretty, but with dark Italian eyes, and one of the richest and most pathetic voices I have ever heard.

A sorrowful picture those two waning lives made up. Ah! if spiritism were not a base sham and a vile profanity, surely mothers would hover near such forlorn beds, with love

and sustenance! . . . as, God knows, perhaps they do.

Your binder is a miracle. As to "communicating" with mine, pray tell him mine is incapable of communication. I doubt whether he can write his name. He is a clever workman, no more. I will, however, obtain from him the address of the Paris dealer in marble papers, or, if he will select what he likes best in the samples sent, I will get my man to pick out the best sheets for him, and forward them. R. Birdsall's letter took the breath out of me. Why he is the rarest of all binders, a binder of education. He is the first of that stamp I have met. His letter is wonderful.

Sorting a quantity of loose litter I come on what appears to have been a manuscript volume, with only the last fly-leaf left in it, and on this fly-leaf the following, apparently an epilogue :

"The Voice saith, 'Write.' The Voice saith, 'Write and die.'
I write and die. Faint, fainter on the page,
Line follows line, with dreary gasps and pause
Of agony. This book hath had the prime
And splendour of my being. It hath now
Its outflow and its ending. Make it good,
Heaven and the angels! Christ, confirm it good.

Soft hands pluck at me. Eyes like tender stars

Glimmer through deeps of dark. An icy breath
Sweeps through my House of Life, and pushes wide
Its portals—Lo, I come! O arms of God,
Ye Everlasting Arms, uphold me here
On the dread verge! . . . The Voice saith, 'Die!' I die."

Given the epilogue, where's the poem?
Ever, dear Lady Alwyne, etc.

You ask for more of the two poor children
I spoke of in a recent letter. You will learn
from the enclosed obituary notice that one
of the two is at rest.

She died about a week ago, painlessly and
peacefully. A little while before her death
she asked her sister to play to her, which
she did, with a breaking heart, and . . . that
was the end.

Poor child! Many hard things were said
of her, with what truth God knoweth; but
we may say now, what Elizabeth Barrett
said of a greater spirit:

"Since she had
The genius to be loved, why, let her have
The justice to be honoured in her grave"—

lines that none but a woman could or would
have written. All honour to womanhood
for the same!

Gabrielle's dying reminded me of Luria
(Browning's "Luria," a noble poem) who in

his last hours, won back all the lost loves and friendships, and so passed into the Valley of the Shadow consoled and glorified. Even the girl's blamers and maligners gathered remorsefully round her at the last.

She had a remarkable faculty of winning attachment, in proof of which an episode has just been related to me. When too weak to walk out, and being in an excited and restless state, she made frequent use of cabs, and was always driven by the same coachman—a poor, sickly, humpbacked lad, who conceived a devoted but silent affection for her, that manifested itself, however, in indirect and touching ways. She was sure to find in the cab, for instance, a bouquet of fresh violets, a packet of bonbons, a little bottle of perfume, or some other similar attention, and the day after her death the poor fellow came to the door and asked humbly to be allowed to see her face once more, which was not refused him. He stood by her bedside, and shook and sobbed, and refused to be comforted, and he followed her, afterwards, to her grave.

And so you are back in the country in spite of snow and frost and bitter blasts. I twit my wife with the fact—who will not hear

of migrating, till the first swallow comes with a south-west wind. When I have no better occupation I stamp the patterns out of all the carpets, with impatience to be off. Nobody, to look at me, would take me for an impatient man, and I am the *most* impatient of men. The one thing I never could attain to, is the faculty of waiting. And it is such a great and heroic faculty!

BOITSFORT,
May 2, 1875.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

We are off for a few days' scramble to Frankfort and Heidelberg.

We shall be back at the latest on the 18th . . . *planting-out day*. Do you know anything of the so-called "Saints de Glâce"? They occur on the 15th, 16th, and 17th, of this month, and are almost invariably attended with a refrigeration of the atmosphere. Last year and the year before they were fatal to the fruits.

There has been a grand discussion about Tiny, and it is at last decided that Tiny is to scramble too.

If he is troublesome, I mean to drop him into the Great Tun at Heidelberg.

Good-bye, dear Lady Alwyne, our joint good-bye.

Ever sincerely yours.

May 28, 1875.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

Our scramble is over, and you should see the conceit in Tiny's countenance! He treats Loo-loo (the porter's dog in the country, who has never been out of his village) with supreme contempt. Tiny, perched on my shoulder, "taking notes" all down the Rhine, was a sight. I had no idea he had such a taste for the picturesque.

Frankfort is lovely at this season, standing knee-deep in greenery, and all its promenades roofed over with tender leafage. It was a charming change from stiff, windy, dusty Brussels. We liked the town in all respects. There is something naïve and primitive and God-fearing in it, and it is chock-full of children and birds. At the opera, half the boxes were filled with young girls, unchaperoned, and sometimes the only occupant of a box was a little maid of ten or eleven. Their maids bring them to the theatre and take them away—*et tout est dit*.

"I never was in such a moral place," said

I one evening about half-past eight. "I'll take a stroll and see the vice of the town." But I reckoned without my host—the vice and the virtue had alike gone to bed ; not a lamp was lighted in the streets, not a shop left open. "Herr Doctor," quoth I (our friend and host was a Herr Doctor), "where are the *adventures* of Frankfort?" "In travellers' brains," quoth the Herr Doctor, with a twinkle in his eye.

All the blackbirds in the world live at Frankfort. Did you know that? I believe, myself, that all the dead and gone Frankfortois are converted into birds of that feather. No other theory could account for the infinite number of them, and for their familiar at-homish ways. They don't "peck off your nose," but they perch on it.

We lived in a house full of young girls—in a neighbourhood of nothing else—and all these young girls rushed in and out of each other's houses at all hours, and scampered over each other's gardens, and had grand gatherings under the great trees in the gloaming, and sang their German *Lieder* with voices like silver bells—"Et ego in Arcadia," one felt disposed to croon to oneself with an amused astonishment.

I was carried off for an excursion one day, with about five-and-thirty children, to the Taunus Mountains, and we came back *thirty-six* of that time of life, so young had I grown in the meantime. How could I be otherwise in that green region of dewy slopes, with all the youth of the world flushing out in every sort of exquisite blossom? The apple-orchards were a thing to dream of, a divine sight!

Divine, too, was the *Mai-trank* and the sausage; but it took Tiny some time to get used to greengage jam with his food. The first day he surveyed it at a distance, his tail erect in horror. . . . But enough nonsense. Are you quite well—"ferry well"? and enjoying the season, in spite of its dry-heartedness? I found my garden somewhat cindery, but a shower or two have done it good, and the clematises are, at all events, in splendid flower.

May I hope for a line soon?

July 17, 1875.

Without going quite so far as —— in my verdict on "Mary Tudor," I cannot say that my first impressions have been greatly modified by my subsequent readings.

I finished the work about a week ago, and find now that all I really care for in it is the finale—the last two scenes with Mary, which seem to me undoubtedly fine. In the picture scene, especially, there is a touch of pathos (her exclamation, “Oh, God! I have slain my Philip!”) worthy of any dramatist, however great. But the drama as a whole, is less a drama than a chronicle, giving us glimpses of historic characters, but without any combined action; it is a clever, conscientious, archæological study in the style of Alma Tadema’s pictures, but there is no strong dramatic life in it, Mary’s rôle excepted, and I cry, with you, “How can it ever be made successful on the stage?” The book has left me so indifferent that I doubt whether I shall open it again, unless, perhaps, to suck the honey of the two songs, which are delicious. I infer from what M. B. tells me that the critiques are of an acid character, but she considers the *Athenæum* malignant, which I do not.

For a wonder, I wrote this from home, seated under my vine (fig-tree have I none), which is such a grand vine this year, that it reminds me of the land of milk and honey and the miraculous bunches. If they all

swell and ripen, we may make our own wine, and fill the vacant spaces in my cellar reserved for rare vintages. Alas! my cellar hath many such vacant spaces!

The garden (thank you) is looking up. When we returned from Frankfort, the lawn was a little "Sahara." Now it is one emerald. A scarlet flame has crept over the geranium-beds, glimmer of lapis-lazuli lights up the lobelias, and the Japanese clematises are purple as an Emperor's robe.

Nor are Frankfort gardens more chirpy than ours—partly owing to a catastrophe, a high wind, that swooped down on us the other day and blew all their fledglings out of their nests: the shrubberies swarm with brown atomies, incapable of flight, and with anxious bird mothers, noisy in admonition.

Our latest acquisition (also a windfall) is a crow, jolly and juvenile, who has the run of the place, and whose great amusement is to hop after Tiny, and, when he's off his guard, grab his tail. On Tiny's wheeling round, irate, the crow's face is turned another way, and "his smile, it is genial and bland."

BOITSFORT,

July 25, 1875.

I was quite ignorant of Mr. Guppy. Where was he riz? I think I am unconscious of most of the lights of the age. I see so few English people, and I don't read the *Times*. Does the latter fact shock you? If so, how will you stand this—I HATE the *Times*! The *Times* is a "pieuvre." It sucks people's individualities out of them. It absorbs them utterly to this point, that they *eat Times, drink Times, talk Times, dream Times*, and are good for nothing absolutely at all Times. Now if you worship that idol of brass, with feet of clay, what foot-rule will measure your ire?

October 10, 1875.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

The world was too much with us early and late, so we dodged cleverly between our besetting friends, one fine morning, and fled away to the Valley of the Ourthe, a primitive, pastoral district not far from Liége, where we enjoyed a few days' silence and tranquillity. *Partially* enjoyed them, I must add, for the first face we met on alighting at the

little wayside *auberge* at Zilff was that of a Brussels acquaintance¹ and her pug—the pug being the head of the family in all respects. The Hon. Prittie Pug we found to be a dog of genius, and of the most multiform accomplishments. Thus I met him, one morning, his empty bowl in his mouth, asking for water. On another occasion (his washing day) he was seen carrying his sponge, soap, and towel to his bath, and arranging them in order, previous to a plunge. Having asked once why he was howling so dismally, I was informed he was weeping for his brother, and that, whenever that lost twin was mentioned, he always lifted up his voice and wept sore. At prayer-time, when the big Bible makes its appearance, he immediately falls down dead, and is only resuscitated by the final “Amen,” and, if enjoined to die, in the most crowded thoroughfare, he never hesitates to do so, regardless of consequences. I could fill sheets with his exploits, but the above will suffice for you to recount to Play, and astonish his weak mind. We parted from Prittie Pug with regret on both sides—slightly alleviated on mine, however, by the

¹ The Hon. Mrs. Prittie with her three children and a pug dog.

fact that in all our excursions he insisted on sitting on my knee—and he was a very heavy dog.

The season was a *trifle* too advanced for our expedition, and the weather chilly and variable, especially for a country where fires are lighted at a fixed date, no matter what amount of frostiness may precede it. I remember the time, being a patriarch, when the same rule held good in England. Oh my blue nose! Oh my chilblains in the old-fashioned school! and oh the uproar of jubilation when the first fire roared in the grate, and the big boys trampled the small boys under foot in their rush to it! Are school-boys happier now, I wonder, now that they have fires even in their bedrooms, and that the old “stick-jaw” pudding has become a mediæval myth?

But to return to the Valley of the Ourthe. It is a primitive place, in all the length and breadth of it. You are lodged and boarded for half a crown a day, and you eat hare and partridge, and wild boar and roebuck, and drink air that is better than wine of the choicest vintage; and the mountain wind blows all the dust out of you, not only the outside dust, but that mental and moral dust

that is so much more encumbering and perilous.

It is a charming locality enough for a month's sojourn in full midsummer, provided always that you are not too exacting as to creature comforts, nor too apt to be victimised by crumpled rose-leaves. Tiny went with us, but was of a saturnine humour mostly. The Hon. Prittie Pug threw him into the shade, and also trod on his toes. The Hon. Prittie Pug was the lion of the place—he had his courtiers and his sycophants—and Tiny, who is a sort of microscopic lion, too, in his own circle, was disgusted.

III

November 22, 1875.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

I am without tidings of you, but am fain to hope nothing untoward lurks behind your silence. Perhaps you feel as I do, half disposed to hybernate, now that the warmth and greenness and gladness of the earth are over and gone, and the—

“Set grey life and apathetic end”

are all that are left of it.

I have a little box-tortoise that is quite of that way of thinking. All the summer through he crawled and ate, ate and crawled, perambulated the lawn, and squared the circle of it, but was found invariably at the same spot, at the same hour, in his bed of moss.

Now the edge is quite off his appetite. Nothing tempts him but warmth. When a fire is lighted in his little parlour, his basket-lid begins to creak, a grey snout (*his*

“apathetic end”) protrudes, and presently our friend wobbles over the rim, steers to the front of the stove, and basks there motionless for hours. He reminds me of my childish days, and of an old uncle that I had then, who was exactly like a tortoise, in face exactly like a tortoise, indeed, in most respects. He had the meek, inoffensive nature of the creature, and its slow, vegetative ways. I believe I came at last to consider him a bona-fide human tortoise, wanting nothing but the shell.

We were friends, in a way, and I was fond of creeping into his den—a little room, chock-full of cupboards and cabinets stuffed with queer odds and ends, amongst the rest a cockatoo in a coffin that impressed my juvenile mind with awe. When the weather was warm, and the old man became mildly vivacious, he would open his cupboards and drawers and air his treasures, watching my delight and astonishment the while with a queer twinkle in his eye and the protrusion and withdrawal of his long wrinkled neck. Voice he had none, that I can recollect. A sort of dry rustle in his throat was his nearest approach to speech.

He lived to an advanced age, but hyber-

nated continually towards the end, and perplexed his relatives by passing at last imperceptibly out of life into death without even a dry rustle by way of adieu. Some folks thought he should have been kept in a coffin, like his cockatoo, till the return of warm weather; others went so far as to declare that he had been buried alive, which perhaps he was.

In any case, the box-tortoise has brought back this childish episode (how far away it seems!) vividly to my memory—so much so that, having dropped into a drowse the other day, my wife declares I chuckled audibly to myself, “He has got his shell at last—what a blessing!”

I must have had a vision of my deceased uncle, beatified, a *complete* tortoise, shell and all! . . . *Requiescat in (cara) pace!*

BOITSFORT,

June 10, 1876.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

M. B. sent me those coals of fire from Castle Ashby for my devoted head. Not possessing a forest of hair, the devoted head is sensible to coals of fire. So here I am, on my knees, Humility and Penitence personified . . . and, pray you, forgive me!

And, having forgiven, will you not do your unworthy servant the honour to sit down under this honey-suckle hedge in his garden and hear the nightingale sing?

For singing he is at this moment, at the top of his voice, singing as when he made old Izaak wonder what manner of melody God could have provided for the saints in heaven, seeing that He allowed even bad men such music on earth. But there I am at issue with Izaak. A rapt bird is the nightingale. He sings in an ecstasy for the unseen. Bad men hear him not and they are unheard of him.

The other evening (it was Whit-Monday) I had proof of this. Having to go to the station, I found there a tipsy-rollicking, swearing, shouting crowd. Close to them, on an acacia bough overhanging the rails, sang a nightingale. Through all the unseemly hubbub, he went on singing, singing in a rapture. Nobody heeded him—he gave heed to nobody. He was singing for the unseen, and straightway I pictured to myself a circle of pure, spiritual faces gathered round him in the gloaming, the faces of blessed spirits gleaning in and garnering his music in their heart of hearts.

No, neither for bad men nor for good does the nightingale sing. We wake up in the dead of the night and hear him pipe and trill in the lonely gardens.

“Lonely!” quoth old Izaak, whom God bless!

“Nay, my masters, peradventure the saints of heaven are his audience even there!”

And, now you are in it, what do you think of my garden? Perhaps you wonder (a kindly, benevolent wonder) at my caring so much about it. It does not at all strike you. It has no special mark or likelihood. Its green turf and open sunshine, and its look-out over the woods and far away, are its sole merits, except this: that it *holds* the sunshine, it *traps* the sunshine and keeps it. Not a wandering ray but it takes possession of and uses for its profit. But this one must live in my garden to appreciate, and you make so short a stay. What if it were to take you for a part of the sunshine, and trap you and hold you, and not let you go?

What do you think of Macaulay? He strikes me as a beautiful instance of a sound and well-balanced organisation. A man that bears looking at, even in his personality, assuming Trevelyan's Memoir to be a truth-

ful one. I rank that sort of organisation above genius, because it is as harmonious and complete in all its parts as anything human can be. Genius, on the contrary, is apt to show an extreme development of one faculty and an insufficient development of others. A man of genius may be classed among monsters, from that point of view—but I am prosing and drowsing. It is time I should release you . . . with my garden's consent.

Did you grieve over George Sand's departure? that "*ultima Romanorum*?" It strikes me that her death may almost be called still-born, so little impression does it seem to have made in France. What a tolling of bells there would have been twenty years ago over such a loss!

And now, dear Lady Alwyne, you are back in Castle Ashby, tell me how passed the journey and all about it, I beseech you. Fancy me standing on one leg with my ear in my hand, like Fine-ear, listening to the grasses growing. Surely you will not keep me in that position for ever and ay!

Mrs. Westwood's kindest remembrances, and believe me always,

Very sincerely yours.

December 2, 1876.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

Yes, the presence of children in a childless house transmutes and glorifies its atmosphere—makes it lovely with “the light that never shone on sea or shore”—but, nevertheless, the experiment is not always a success.

Not long ago, for instance, we rashly took charge of two boys deserted by their vagabond parents, who had gone oversea, and “Oh! the wooing o’t!” The eldest, stupid and sly, the second sickly and dismal, a white-faced boy without eyebrows. Indeed, they were both white-faced and fishy, and horrible plagues. They crawled over us like beetles, they stuck to us like leeches, they hung about us, they pressed against us, they spoiled our tempers, they harrowed our dreams. Occupation had they none. In a room they did nothing but moon up and down, like bears in a cage. I used to watch them at twilight blobbing feebly to and fro in the obscurity like two boiled calves’ heads in a fog.

In the garden they were quite at sea. Of the swing they were afraid. Croquet they ignored. A cat was enough to make them

jump. When the goat butted at them, they turned white all over. You imagine the jubilation that sprang up in our hearts when at last the vagabond parents came home and claimed the brats. We pushed them all into each other's arms *avec effusion*, and when the door closed behind them we could have danced a saraband. Never, no never, we swore should those two white-faced nightmares squat on our vitals again!

We like girls best. They are prettier and sweeter. *À propos de bottes*: "Before my mamma went to the angels," quoth a six-year-old, "*she used to hit hard.*"

And the sweetest of all little maids is our Mouse, and the faithfullest. She writes to us twice a week funny English letters, full of fondness and false idiom.

I am not excited about "Harold." I care very little about the author of "Queen Mary." I don't in the least mix him up with the great poet who wrote the "Idylls of the King." I consider the great poet in question ended his career with that crowning work. If he had gone down into his grave, "Queen Mary," and probably "Harold," might have been rapped out by

a table to the spiritists on his behalf, from that separate state, which seems so inferior on the ground of intelligence. I have never really reopened "Queen Mary" since I read it first, and I am not sure that I shall open "Harold" at all. M. B. says it is fine ; but M. B. is in the glamour.

The great curse of literature in our epoch is the money-making faculty it possesses. Do you remember any case in former centuries of men of letters, poets, or what not, *writing themselves out*, working their brains threadbare? Nowadays that is the natural, the inevitable ending of all literary success. In short, the money question is the curse of our time. It has suppressed imagination, it has degraded humanity in every possible way, and I fear there is a lower deep still in the lowest, into which we have yet to descend.

Castle Ashby stands at the head of a grand list of schemes we have for the future, including Switzerland, Italy, and so on and on. We have seen so little of the world, my wife and I. Next month we shall perhaps run away from the Belgian winter to the South.

January 4, 1877.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

We are going to run away from the mud and the mist for a few weeks' sojourn in the South. Our address, up to the end of February, will be "Villa Val Fleuri, Route d'Antibes, Cannes," a statement which reads like a petition; nay, which is one.

It will give us much pleasure to hear from you, when you have a moment to spare, if you will be so good.

I shall take few illusions to the South. I don't believe in gardens of the Hesperides, and, if dragon there be, I shall not disturb him to steal his apples. I have tasted those apples. A Ribston Pippin beats them hollow. I don't believe in earthly paradises, let Mr. Morris sing as he will. And orange and citron groves sound pretty in verse, but are a poor sort of thing in reality. Olives are suggestive, in a gastronomic sense, but I fancy the dusty grey leafage of the tree cannot be attractive. In short, I believe the South to be a land of shams; but what will not be shams are the new life and sensation and impression, and to them I look forward with interest. We hope to leave on Monday, if the weather does not

turn to frost in the meantime. In the latter case we shall wait.

VILLA VAL FLEURI,
ROUTE D'ANTIBES, CANNES.

January 19, 1877.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

Your welcome little letter followed us here, with its welcome promise of more anon. Thanks and thanks !

Yes, Tiny came with us to open his mind, and also a little English maid, who stretched her eyes so wide when she got to Marseilles that she has not been able to shut them since. I was afraid we should have to leave her at a *maison de santé*.

For my own part, it was not through the climate, or sea, or sky at Marseilles (the northern weather having followed us thus far) that I realised the South, but through its population. It is a sort of havoc of the world and its nationalities. Woolly-headed, black-skinned Africa jostles you in the causeways. Egypt and Nubia gloom across your track. A true Turk, with a fusty old turban, sells you "Turkish delight," a Basque woman, splendid in costume, and with marvellous eyes, offers you violets. An Arab in a white burnouse and yellow slippers

stalks by you with a swing. A Malay, leaning against the stem of a *platan*, scratches his book. You can see he is used to—

“Zig, zig, zigging,
Up against the mizzen rigging.”

And about the port all these strongly accented types congregate and swarm and grovel, and chatter and dance and howl, till you end by feeling like Daniel in the wild beasts' den, without that holy man's assurance of personal safety.

And, oh! the fish-market! it took the breath out of me. Not a single fish-face that I knew—not one! They were like the fish in the “Arabian Nights”—scarlet and green and gold and black, with orange stripes, and blue as the sky, and pearly as the shell, and beautiful one and all. The small fry, with which they make the *bouille-à-baise*, were lovely. What a pity they should spoil a dish that should be so poetical by a strong admixture of garlic!

But the fish-women were not as beautiful as their fish. Oh, no! I do not think I saw a pretty face in all Marseilles. Everybody is kiln-dried, black, shrivelled. You feel

tempted to touch a hand here and a face there to see if you can bear the heat of them. The town struck me with its stateliness, which it owes mainly to those grand avenues of *platans* that you see everywhere. Even without their foliage how stately they are! We passed a whole day at Marseilles, and one previously at Lyons, and we reached Cannes, I am proud to announce, in a triumphant state of health and unfatigue. We like Cannes, and we like our quarters, which look out on the sea, and the Esterel mountain, and the Isle Ste Marguerite. The colouring of everything is divine; one is afraid to put it on earthly paper. That little vignette (by an incapable "amateur") is the Corsican mountains at sunrise, not to be seen every day. I scribble and daub, and try to glean and garner infinitesimal scraps of beauty to carry home with me; but it is discouraging work. The beauty is too sublimated to be tampered with by mortal fingers.

We make long excursions in sailing-boats, gliding over violet waves towards dim, rosy mountains, and we eat lotus-fruit, and grow soft and foolish. And we make recantations by the score, for have we not been into the

garden of the Hesperides, and made friends with the Dragon? and has he not stretched out his great, grim paw, and dropped golden fruit into our palm? and have we not found it nice . . . with sugar? And have we not worshipped the palm, and done obeisance to the olive-tree, and rejoiced in the sea-pine?

We have been to Nice, but it was not so sympathetic to either of us as Cannes—too towny and mundane, and musliny and patchouli-ish, too far away from the country, too stuffed with the type Dives. On Monday we propose going to Mentone, and our homeward route will lie through Genoa, Turin, and Mont Cenis, I hope.

Of course we have visited Bazaine's prison, and seen the precipice down which he . . . never went. Everybody here is convinced, and so am I, that he walked quietly out at the back door of the establishment into the sweet little forest of sea-pine and myrtle, and so down to the beach, where his spouse put a comforter round his neck, and carried him off to the tune of "Pop goes the Weasel." He had a splendid view from his window—the sea, the town, the mountains, and, stretching out to the right, tier above tier of snowy Alps.

The gardens are really beautiful, and quite tropical in their character. All the mimosa tribe are in full flower, covered with their minute golden balls. Heliotropes, eight feet high, carpet the walls. Roses are scanty, the Gloire de Dijon and the common China do all the work. Of violets there is no end, but I have not yet seen them in country ways. The almond-tree is already in blossom, so mild has the winter been hitherto.

Good-bye, dear Lady Alwyne. The wife's best remembrances, and all pleasant wishes from yours ever sincerely.

January 29, 1877.

We have not yet been to Mentone, so your letter (for which I thank you so much) was in time. We will see all you tell us. The carriage drive from Nice to Mentone, by the Cornice road and the Cap St. Martin, was already down on our list. The Villa St. Louis has been added.

On Friday we passed the day at Monte Carlo and Monaco, both very striking in aspect—more so certainly than Cannes, because the towering rocks and headlands of the cornice rise up abruptly out of the very

sea, and soar till they meet cloudland. At Monaco we failed to see the Château, His Serene Highness being in his counting-house counting out his money. If I may judge by a glimpse of him I got afterwards, the addition cannot have been satisfactory, for he looked cross and cantankerous.

There is not much in the little town apart from its situation, so we ran down the hill to Monte Carlo, made a dash into the gambling-rooms, won a little pot of money, and retreated. I saw all the old faces round the table that I had seen fifty times before at Baden and Homburg and Spa—the professional gambler, vileness incarnate; the quarrelsome female gambler, feeble on points of honour; the inexperienced youth risking his last piece, and losing it; the timid young woman slipping her gold on to the board furtively, her compressed lips quivering *malgré elle* when the ruthless croupier raked them away. All the old types, in short.

We had soon had enough of it, and were glad to go out into a worthier presence. I could not help wondering at the profanity and insolence of such an establishment in such a spot, with the great sea underneath roaring wrathfully at it, and the solemn

rocks and sublime sky above, for witness and consummation.

Along the road from Cannes to Monaco we saw several of the little Italian towns you speak of; Italian, at least, in all but the arbitrary line of demarcation. I delight in them. How they climb and clamber up their mountain! How they wriggle up the steep ascent, hiding every green thing as they go! How they cluster and swarm round the summit, like bees!—and, having reached it, how they bask and whiten in the sun! How they drink it in at every pore of door and window, losing not a ray of it!

What lizard lives these towns lead! Looking at them from afar, it requires but a slight stretch of the imagination to be inside, and in the heat of them; to see the winding streets now blazing in light, now black in shadow; the cool courtyards, each with its terrace, looking down the mountain slopes, and lined with oleanders, each with its tiny fountain, tinkling, tinkling on through time and eternity, and, perchance, the *padrone* by the side of it, his wine-flask plunged up to the neck in the cold water, with a leaf for sole stopper. You see the gossips

at the doors with their brown-baked faces. You hear the drowsy hum of the little town's slow life. You wonder what it would be to spend a long year there ; to drink in the sun yourself at every pore, like the houses ; to grow mellow and ripe, like the old wine in the cellars ; to hear nothing, care nothing, dream nothing of the world outside !

What would the end be ? Would one hang oneself, like the Frenchman, from sheer ennui, or would one take away store enough of sunshine to brighten all the remainder of life ? *I* hold by the latter opinion.

This morning we have visited a remarkable site in the proximity of Cannes, a site that, by its elevation and solitariness, brings to your mind that exceeding high mountain from which One, in old days, saw all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them in a moment of time.

The day has been lovely. If the earth had blossomed into existence between the latest sunset and sunrise it could not have looked fresher, more radiant, more free from stain or taint—nay, if the creating Word had but just pronounced it good.

We wound round and round the mountain, ever higher and higher, and at each turn the

infinite view met us—through the foldings of distant hills, through rocks and ravines, through twisted boughs of olive and sea-pine—all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. I came down half intoxicated. This wine of beauty is a subtle and strong drink.

But of all the mountains of my acquaintance there are none so poetical as the Esterels, that front us at Cannes. I think they have an atmosphere of their own. A vapour, mauve and rose-tinted, drops over them in folds like a veil. I sit watching them by the hour, with an ever-new enjoyment. Now a headland is thrust out, and takes the sun; now a line of cliffs glimmers, and is gone. Now a hollow glooms forth, with shade on shade of purple in its deep recess. At sunset they stand up black, like a rampart, against the glory. At sunrise they are pure dreamland; but distinct, evident, legible, never. I declare the Siren must be queen of them, and that some cruel whirlpool must lurk in the shadow of their rocks. When we boat next we mean to go and see, stuffing our ears with cotton, or having ourselves bound to the mast, like sage Ulysses in a similar adventure.

And so you have met with my son ! (not my nephew ; I almost brought him up). That was a pleasant reading to me. I hope you found him nice. He is really so when you know him well, and has a great deal of artistic taste. He was made high sheriff of some county lately. Does that account for his crimson lapels ? Do high sheriffs blossom into crimson in that part of their vestments ? Was the boy well ? I hope so. It was very kind of you to send for him.

And now, dear Lady Alwyne, you must have had enough of me. If you have had too much, it is a little your fault for listening to my babble so benevolently. I was going to wish I could send you a slice of the South in my letter, but I remember you say the South is with you already. Happy you in that case, for the reports sent me from Paris and Brussels are of the dreariest colour ; damp, fog, mud—every form of elemental misery.

The wife begs me to say all kind things, and to add that she is enjoying herself immensely, as indeed she is.

Ever, dear Lady Alwyne,

Very sincerely yours

We have not yet felt the mistral, but since I began my letter a sirocco has set in, and is blowing hot and fierce. I have just been down to the Phara, our *Ultima Thule*, to see the waves race shoreward, leaping like sea-horses over the rocks. Mother Carey's chickens were having a jolly time of it in the blue water—here a thousand, and there a thousand, with the sunshine on all their sweet backs. This afternoon's sirocco was predicted last night by a sunset of such surpassing beauty as to baffle description. It was as if the gates of heaven had been thrown wide open, and all the glory of God had come surging through.

Your little boys must be very nice. We have a pretty child here too. Tiny and she are fast friends. The vignette heading my letter is a dead and dry version of the line of snowy Alps that Bazaine looked out upon from his prison

IV

April 9, 1877.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

We were *very, very* glad to hear from you. I have been wishing to write for some time past, but a new trouble, as you are aware, has fallen upon us within the last few days. My dear wife has lost an uncle she was very fond of, a near neighbour of ours in town, and, of course, a very familiar face in our home.

The first great grief has, in some sort, absorbed the second; still, the shadow has been deepened and the void been made more palpably real, all round us, by this new bereavement.

Less fortunate than ourselves, *his* daughter and only child arrived too late. She had come from Kenmare, in Ireland, and he had been dead two days when she reached Brussels. By the by she is a not distant neighbour of the Kenmares, with whom Miss

Boyle is staying at Cannes. She will have told you how abruptly our acquaintance was made, on my side at least. She wrote me such a cordial little note, on finding that we had left Cannes, regretting that she had *missed* my acquaintance—that I asked her to do me the honour of assuming that she had *not* missed it, and thereupon plunged at once *in medias res* peeled oranges with her in the Garden of the Hesperides, and took tea and tarts with her at Rumpelmeyer's (the pastry-cook) on the beach, and when she wrote again she signed herself, "Your old Friend." I think she must be very charming and unusual, and an impression that such was the case is caused partly, no doubt, from what you had previously told me was my only excuse for *my* unusual proceeding.

Mentone! How far away it is now! In what a different world! How we seem to have graved it up, with a "Nevermore" on the sepulchral stone! For surely "never more" will the two eyes that are dearest to me in this mortal life look upon that paradise again. It was our last glimpse of it—the very last!

We drove from Monaco thither by the

Cornice, till we came under Roccabruna, and then we deviated from the road into the olive-wood of the Cap Martin—that weird and wonderful olive wood—crowded with ghostly, damned souls of olive-trees, eloquent with a Dantesque horror. We wound round and round and on and on, and there was no wind, and never a leaf of all that lacy foliage stirred; but the gloom thickened and deepened, and we did not speak. Even a little child that was with us grew mute and solemn.

We felt twisted and tortured, like the olive-trees, till suddenly the spell was broken. A dazzle of sunshine burst on us, we had reached the point of the Cape, and there was the sea with its purple, and the sky with its blue, and, for olive-trees, the pines—an *army* of pines, all bowing their solemn heads one way as if in salutation of an invisible Neptune, or perhaps of those visible white and shining towns far off, Ventimiglia and Bordighera by the sea.

Next month our Mouse is to come, and that will cheer us both. We told her *not* to come, that it was too dull for her,¹ and she flushed up and flung out, and asked what we

¹ Mrs. Westwood had recently lost an uncle.

took her for ? and come she would ! stamping her foot, through three pages. Of course, we shall see that the cloud has its silver lining for the child, and so we shall benefit by the lining ourselves, perhaps.

Another of our child-loves turned up the other day in the most unexpected fashion. I was eating my solitary dinner (my wife being by her uncle's bedside) when a carriage stopped at the door. As I expected a carriage, with a friend in it, I forestalled the servant and opened the door myself. In walked the most charming creature you can imagine with outstretched hand, " Here I am, dear Mr. Westwood " ; and, seeing a little uncertainty in my face—" I'm Poppy, and that"—glancing mischievously over her shoulder—" that is my husband."

The husband was six feet high and looked very proud of her and rather shy.

" We've been married eighteen months," quoth Poppy (she is eighteen and he nineteen, as I found out afterwards) and we have lost almost all our money, and we are going out to Texas to farm land amongst the savages, and we have got a trunk full of revolvers and bowie-knives, and . . . isn't it jolly ? And oh, Mr. Westwood, there's

a baby at home, and won't you come and see it? He's such a duck!" Of course I would go and see the baby, I said; "and does he wear a bowie-knife in his girdle?" quoth I.

"And oh! Mr. Westwood"—all her little, incursive sentences, rippling off into laughter, began with an "Oh!"—"Don't you remember that you never could find any words to rhyme with my name?"

"That's true," quoth I; "but it will not be so when you are in Texas. When you are mopping your own floors, then sloppy and floppy will pair off with Poppy,"—whereat she laughed. Poor children!—for utter and absolute children they are—what hope can there be for them in that wild land?

We had made Poppy's acquaintance when she was a child at school here—just arrived from Australia—as wild as Puck's sister, and the wittiest little witch you can conceive, and here she was (with a yard and a half of golden hair down her back) married—a runaway marriage it was—and going out to the battle of life, with bowie-knives and revolvers for her sole defence. Did I mention that the baby is only three months and a half old? "Very young," I suggested, "for such

an awfully long journey." "Nay," said the mother, "he came over by Calais and laughed all the way." "But do you know *how* far it is?" I asked, and, seeing they did not—"Texas," said I solemnly, out of my shoes—"Texas is on the outside edge of the earth, and, if you jump, you may touch the moon from it—and all the fish in those seas (they in a craze) are scamps, and all the inhabitants of the land, sharks! But it made no impression.

They stayed several days with us, Poppy airing, every day, some new pretty Parisian toilette . . . in the style of Texas, and we grew more and more sorrowful for them. We did what we could. We sent them to the Director of our Observatory here, who has himself farmed land in Texas for many years, and could tell them all about it. We crammed as much useful information as was possible into their wild young heads, but at parting we had come to the conclusion that the baby was the most sensible member of the party, and would be their chief stay and guidance in the perilous path that lies before them.

Forgive me if I have wearied you with this long story of our waifs and strays. The

chapter of our young loves might be extended indefinitely. We have had so many of them, and such a pretty regiment they would make on a smooth lawn on a summer's day! Ah me!

Let me hear from you again, dear Lady Alwyne, soon, if it is not too painful to you to write. I am glad you have got a nephew at your elbow. Children are God's medicine for minds diseased, are they not?

God bless you, dear Lady Alwyne.

Believe me ever

Very sincerely yours.

I am sure, too, M. B. was delighted with Ruskin's note, and that she will never abuse him any more. I had foreknowledge of that note, having had some correspondence with Ruskin, and feeling quite sure that M. B.'s drawing would be just what would delight him. I am a great admirer of Ruskin myself, with all his faults, which are manifest and self-avowed enough. We have nobody else like him, and I admire him all the more because he stands alone in taking his shoes off his feet on what he considers holy ground. The rest wear their shoes on their feet, and their hats on their heads, to boot.

October 10, 1877.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

I am so sorry—so sorry! I had an impression that you must be by your own fireside ere this, and all your anxieties at an end. And you are still in Venice, and Lord Alwyne is less well, and there is only one good thing in your letter to M. B., that you have friends near you, and that they are “kind and helpful.”

I feel very unhappy about you, and shall look anxiously for fresh news, and hope they may be better. A *card* will do if you have not time for a letter.

Poor —— is very sad. It is the unhappy side of pets that they pull too much at our hearts when they are taken from us, and this pet cat seems to have filled a large place in the poor solitary woman's heart. I told her I could not counsel the profanity of a *cat remplaceant* for Puggie, but that if I lived in her neighbourhood she should look out of her window, on a sunshiny morning, and see a little white bundle on the doorstep, and when the bundle was unwrapped a small pup should jump out of it, and dance a saraband clumsily, as pups do, on the table, under her nose. She would look languidly at the pup

at first, and half remorsefully, but would end by opening a corner of her heart to it, and the pup would go in. I sent her a canary once in that fashion, and it was a delight to her for years. Nobody knows what a solace and a blessing these small creatures are to lonely folk.

I sent — a French book yesterday, "*Le Petit Chose*," by Daudet—a charming little book which I recommend to your notice.

Do you remember my story of Poppy and the three babies, father, mother, and child? They went and did it, just as they said they would. I had a letter from them the other day dated from Texas. They had bought a wheat farm of 480 acres, and built a cosy eight-roomed house, and they were rapturous about the wealth of mountain and forest seen from their windows; and of course it's the youngest baby that does the farming. They invite us pressingly to come and see them for "a year or two—it's only a three days' and nights' journey from New York in the cars."

Poor, pretty Poppy, with the golden locks! I can't realise that all this should have happened to her in so short a time. It seems but a year or so since we saw her first, a

child at school, and the most complete incarnation of mischief I ever met with. A Puck in petticoats, brimming over with wit and "malice" and petulance! and now she is three days and nights from civilisation in wild Texas.

Good-bye, dear Lady Alwyne. I will write again soon. Is there any sort of paper you or Lord Alwyne would care to see? Pray say so in that case. We can get most papers here.

Believe me always,

Very sincerely yours.

October 18, 1877.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

That is good news indeed! and most welcome. I trust Lord Alwyne's convalescence, now that it has fairly set in, will go on surely, if slowly. I quite understand his sentiment, I should never mind going back to the room in which I got well, it is the room one leaves *ill* that one shrinks from returning to.

You have been long enough in Venice now, to be in the full glamour and enchantment of it—notwithstanding the partial imprisonment you have undergone. It is a

glamour and enchantment that must find its way in through every open door and window, that must make itself felt in every flush of sunset, however dimly seen, in the distant glimmer of stars, in the plash of the gondolier's oar. In the very sweetness of the silence, it must creep into your soul, unawares, and end, by holding it captive.

Do you rave about St. Mark's, as Ruskin does, in that divine raving of the "Stones of Venice"? What a happy and artistic idea, that of his, to establish a comparison between an English Cathedral and its surroundings, its austere character, its grey ruggedness, its wind-swept and rain-beaten solemnity, and St. Mark's, under the blue Venetian sky, many-tinted as a dove's plumage, full to overflowing with a luxurious and tender grace. I have always thought that passage in Ruskin one of the finest bits of prose in the language. Is he still in Venice, and is his book nearly ready? You know I have a great admiration for Ruskin, notwithstanding his many and manifest short-comings.¹

I send you a *Graphic* and *Daily News*. I tried to get something that might interest

¹ Mr. Russell Lowell said to me that Ruskin had an exquisite divining-rod for what was true and noble.—F. C.

Lord Alwyne, in a special sense, but failed. The *Times*, I suppose, he sees.

With my wife's best regards and warmest felicitations, I remain, dear Lady Alwyne,
Always very sincerely yours.

November 17, 1877.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

That was a famous letter! a letter to be marked with a white stone (mayn't I make a provision of white stones, for your stay in the South?) Thanks for it! and thrice thanks, though it tips a cold shoulder to my beloved Cannes. But do not let weather disquiet you. "The rain it raineth every day," is not a Mediterranean proverb. Three consecutive days of bad weather, is the maximum, in my experience, even if it goes so far, and when it brightens, what a brightness it is! Oh, yes! Before the civilisation (which is barbarism, with a smug face) made its way to those divine shores, they must have had a beauty of wildness and sublimity we cannot imagine now, a beauty that has retreated into inland folds and windings of the hills, out of sight and seldom sought for. Much of it might still be discovered in the neighbourhood of Mentone,

and it struck me that between Mentone and Bordighera civilisation had been less rampant and offensive than elsewhere. But I had merely a distant view of that part of the coast in rounding the Cap Martin.

Yes, we are undeniably pernicious creatures. If we had to render back to the Creator the world He once found good, what would be His judgment on it? We have stamped our sordid money-marks on its face—the mark of our rapacity and greed, of our unconscientiousness, of our vileness of soul. It has become a sorry, ill-used, damaged, degenerate world—a world of turbid waters, and sullied atmosphere, and faded verdure, a world dis-crowned, and yet how beautiful it is still!

Look out from your window on the Esterel and take courage. We are pernicious but *puny* creatures, ambitious in evil, but *impotent*. Every morning the sun laughs us to scorn, every evening its glory flaunts our feebleness. "He is still good," in spite of us, and will remain so. Amen—for that reads like a sermon.

Our residence in Cannes was the Villa Val Fleuri, Route d'Antibes, the third or fourth house, I think, beyond the railway crossing on the right hand. The Route d'Antibes has the reputation of being the

coldest part of Cannes. We had frost behind us and tropical heat in front. I shall never forget my first morning in that house (we arrived in the dark) and my finding myself face to face with the violet sea and mountains on entering the drawing-room. Then I realised the South, and my prejudices dropped from me.

What a pity we went there last year instead of this! It would have been so much better for us now in all respects; but I think nothing would persuade my wife to return to Cannes. It is all darkened for her by a fatal memory, and will be so always.

Was Macaulay the real cause of the Austen revival? I am not sure. It might have been brought about by a natural reaction, from sensational excess in novels. One gets so weary of stabbing and poisoning, of sentimental hysterics, of passion torn to tatters. To pass from the Inferno of the Braddons and Le Fanus into the idyllic calm of the Austen Meadows, into the sobriety and well-orderedness of the Austen life, is a refreshment and a repose.

I delight, myself, in these subdued, self-restrained, real, reasonable pictures of old-fashioned English society—they have a won-

derful charm if looked at aright. They are soundness and sanity, to which you have escaped out of the maddest of Bedlams. You grow calmer and calmer every page you read, the yells and shrieks of your pandemonium grows fainter and fainter, and if, at last, you drop asleep over your book, you have no uneasy dreams, and you wake up clothed and in your right mind.

What a blessing it is that we have a literature abundant in such resources! more abundant, I think, than most literatures, and not in the novel department only. There are tonic books, as well as composing books, to be fallen back upon in case of need.

The other day, feeling in want of strengthening, I plunged into Landor's "Imaginary Conversations," and came out of my reading invigorated, awakened. Walter Savage Landor—it is the name of a giant, and sounds like what it is. He would be one *ultimus Romanorum* if he belonged to any series, if he were not unique.

He was never popular. He was too profound for popularity. The mole is an unpopular beast. Few care to follow through his subterranean galleries. Also the man Landor was prejudiced, crotchety, often

unjust in his modern judgments ; but, setting these few foibles aside, what a grand, liberal, heroic soul was his ! How he paves our pathway with precious metals and pearls of price ! When you have read a few of his sentences are you not tempted to lay down the book and make up the recapitulation of your gains ? To defer it long would be to render the sum incalculable. See—

“ Jasper first,
And second sapphire ; third chalcedony,
The rest in order—last an amethyst.”

In order to test the progress or decadence of an epoch, it is but fair to bring face to face certain antithetical facts. Thus, in this epoch of ours, Landor is ignored, and Swinburne is high and lifted up. Yes, Swinburne and Ouida (why DON'T they marry !) have honour, and round the dead brows of Landor there is no palm. No matter ! There is a divinity about those brows nobler than palms. May the great ghost of that demi-god forgive me for bringing his name into contact (though but for the sake of an antithesis) with those of two such as Swinburne and Ouida.

I am so sorry that the Cannes villas have

eaten into your soul. You see, you labour under the disadvantage of having seen that coast first under a better aspect. I took no souvenirs with me, and accepted the ugly architecture without protest, finding it there, and not being provoked to comment on it—but still, it is only a strip of building. Turn to the right, or turn to the left, and you get out of it. Climb the hills, and it vexes you no more, or take boat on the purple sea, and it becomes sublimated by distance ; it is not an invincible grievance—NO—though you declare it is.

Do you know the Vin d'Asti? If you are not a sworn foe to wines, taste it some day. The recommendation is not quite irrelevant to Cannes scenery, and the way to see it aright. One should not sip cold Bordeaux at Cannes. It exaggerates the architecture.

I came upon the Vin d'Asti quite by accident. "This," quoth I, "is the wine to wash down lotuses with, and to have clear visions of beauty."

With many kind remembrances from my wife, believe me,

Dear Lady Alwyne,

Ever sincerely yours.

April 8, 1878.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

I am sorry to learn from M. B. that you have had fresh anxieties of late, and that a little life, in which you are interested, has been trembling in the balance. I gather, however, from the last letter, that the child is out of danger, but that you see reason to fear the consequences of the operation she has undergone. I trust most heartily that those fears will prove unfounded, and that you will be able to tell me so before long.

What do you think of Tennyson's new ballad? A noble piece of verse. I take it to be an heroic incident, heroically related. All honour to the old Lion, who still has the pluck and the stamina to growl such royal growls! I delight in poems of this class when they display so superb a masterdom. They lift me fairly up by the hair of my head. I rush into the fight like the "Little Revenge," "down the lane of the sea." I am riddled with shot and stifled with battle-smoke, and feel the better for both. I hack and hew, and am hacked and hewed, and I triumph and die, and am none the worse.

This "Revenge" may pair off with the "Charge of the Light Brigade." I do not

know many poems in the language worthy to continue such pairing. There is Browning's "Ride from Ghent to Aix," and some passages in Macaulay, perhaps, but what more?

November 27, 1878.

MY DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

It happened, oddly enough, that the day we received your delightful letter (would the twelve *had* been seventy-two!) we were in company with some Belgian friends of ours—intelligent, open-minded people enough in a general sense—and, the conversation turning on Italian travel, one of the parties (I believe a wife of mine) started a gushing proposition that we should all make an excursion into Italy together.

"Seulement" (preambled that wife of mine) "je constate, que je veux absolument voir Venise, et y rester longtemps." "Venise!" quoth Belgian No. 1, "je vous avoue que je ne tiens nullement à revoir Venise; c'est la ville triste, sale, maussade, ennuyeuse, par excellence; j'y suis resté trois jours, et c'était trop." "C'est vrai," quoth No. 2. "Tout manque à Venise—la vie, le bruit, le mouvement, la gaieté. Venise! C'est un sepulchre, et les gondoles sont des cercueils ambulants.

Pas de Venise!" and, No. 3 and No. 4 being still more violently hostile, our joint excursion fell through then and there, and very wisely, for these worthy folks proved themselves outsiders. They had seen the tombs of Venice, but missed the living soul of it, and so thanked God daily in an inverse sense to that of Mr. Rawdon Brown.

No, Venice and Rome are dead letters to the outsider. They have an atmosphere of their own, a sun and moon of their own, a spell and glamour of their own, beyond his reach and attainment. He pays his railway fare and his boat ticket, and thinks he gets into Venice and Rome. He never gets into them. Eden gates were not more inexorably closed on those first excursionists than are these other gates on him. Yes, he gets into the street, and sees the filth, and smells the bad smells, and turns up his nose at the dilapidations, and considers himself universally sold. He saunters by the Rialto, and paces the Appian way, finding all barren. He hears the gnat in the air, and swears at it, but detects no flutter of the great souls departed, on his right hand and on his left, and not a notion has he, when he shakes the dust off his feet in going, that it is the dust

of holy ground. Poor Jones! Poor Brown! poor Robinson! adopted sons of Cook—peace be with you! but *out* of Rome—*out* of Venice.

The upshot of which is, dear Lady Alwyne, that when we have plenty of time and plenty of pence we mean to go to Venice, without our friends, and enjoy it in our own fashion. Though I have a sorrowful conviction that it is not weeks or months, but years that one ought to stay in such places to be thoroughly inter-penetrated by them.

I was very sorry indeed to hear that you had lost Play. Poor little Play! I remember him perfectly. I shut my eyes and see him seated on a chair by your side at Northampton House, with something white like a mob-cap, round his black muzzle. The loss of a dog that you have had twelve years is always a great loss. In that time they have grown to be part of ourselves, as you say. As a means of softening such losses, I recommend more dogs than one. We have *three*, at this moment—Tiny, Puck, and a little old dog that belonged to my mother-in-law, and that is a relic. Tiny is also descending into the vale, and exhibits more tongue now than is ornamental, but still has

his fits of juvenality. Puck is a beauty and a tyrant—a little brown, bristly-haired terrier—weight about 3 lb. in the scale, but any weight you can imagine in the *social* scale. He is the king of the household, and we are merely his slaves—and where we *are* not there his howl is sure to be. Such a completely despairing, orphaned howl I never heard.

In the dead of the night it awakes us, when, between sleep and sleep, he discovers his loneliness, and then of course somebody has to descend into the lower settlements and bring him up to be comforted. On such occasions his habit is to relate his tribulations in sobbing undertones; never to leave off relating them till a fresh sleep overtakes him.

The worst of the three dogs is that when one barks they all bark, and the horrible, distracting, maddening rattle that fills our house when any face, strange or familiar, enters baffles relation, Tiny and Puck having voices like brad-awls, that pierce you through and through. What a pretty book Dr. Brown wrote about his dogs! Of course you know it.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

I shall never regret having written "The Quest," if only for the kind reception it has met with from you and yours. The little light it possessed was eclipsed by the Tennysonian poems, and I did not think that a hardship ; but I am of course grateful to the friendly hands that did not drop it on that account, and I press them cordially and thankfully.

I will write to Mr. Cautley. I am sorry his book¹ has not cheered him with success. The subject appealed only to the few, of course ; but I feel sure it must have its admirers amongst the quiet-minded, holy-hearted folk.

Mrs. Westwood declines "forgiving." She reserves her forgiveness for quite another sort of letter to yours. I left her washing the three dogs. Tiny and Puck were snapping at each other through the soap-suds.

December 31, 1878.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

It gave us great pleasure to receive your greeting, and we respond to it in all

¹ "A Century of Emblems," by G. S. Cautley.

affection and sincerity. I wish I could have found a pretty card to send you in return for your charming one, but nothing decent is to be had here; some *indecent* ones I have seen in Alma-Tadema-ish style, purporting to represent the amusements and occupations of young girls, and pretty enough in an artistic sense, but I am fain to hope that our young English girls care more for costume and covering than these cards would seem to insinuate. Surely our once *too*-proper England is not rushing to the opposite extreme, and throwing its bonnet over the windmills, as they say in France!

Our Christmas has been a dull and dreary one, and quite exempt from all festivities. The foundations of our lives have been too shaken, of late, for any festal feeling, or even any family gatherings. We still see too sorrowfully the vacant places, hear too audibly the voices that are silent for ever. It used to be "the merriest, happiest time." It can never be so again. Whatever the years bring us, they can never restore the unquestioning hope and hilarity of the past. We may have twilight with its quietness, hope with its stars, but . . . "never glad, confident morning again." How fully you

can enter into that feeling, dear Lady Alwyne, I am well assured.

I am glad you have a daughter. It is sweet to have a daughter—if one could but keep her . . . ah! if one could but keep her! for never was there such a slippery possession. That coming “market gardener” is our Sword of Damocles. Do you remember Dick Swiveller’s pathos on that subject? “I never nursed a dear gazelle to glad me with its soft brown eye, but when it came to know me well, and love me, it was sure to go and marry a market gardener.”

Forgive this brief and wretched letter. I will write more at length shortly.

Ever, dear Lady Alwyne,

Very faithfully and sincerely yours.

March 7, 1879.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

I am quite reassured, and ready to plunge into the confession of every sort of heterodox iniquity. For instance, the next Sunday during a sermon, much of a muchness, I revised my lines, of which I send you another version ; and when that cobbling was at an end, my mind wandered away,

Heaven knows why or wherefore, from the Rev. John Jenkins (that's our pastor, "whom unmerciful disaster hurries fast, and hurries faster"—for my own part I never overtake him) and the little chapel in the rue de Staddart to the Cap Martin and its weird, Dantesque, purgatorial olives, and those other lines I send you too, though I do not care much about them ; nor will you. Only in looking at those olives one always wonders how they came so. It is not the slow wearing and ageing of time that they suggest, but something fiercer and more penitential—a sort of sudden torture and martyrdom.

"THERE SHALL BE NO MORE SEA!"

There shall be no more sea ! Oh ! Land of Heaven,
How shall we front thy glories ? We, that come
From such grey skies—that hear for evermore
The beating of the wind and of the rain
On bitter moorlands ! . . . Merciful, high God,
Can we be happy by Thy great white throne,
Amongst Thy singing angels ? Can we tune
Our tremulous, broken voices to those rapt,
Grand alleluiahs ? . . . Father, shall we tread,
Joyful, the causeway of Thy city of gold,
Between the walls of jasper, where no wind
Ruffles the sabbath calm, nor any moon
Of anguish enters in ? . . . We are so near
To anguish, in this world which Thou hast made.

There shall be no more tears—Thy hand shall wipe
Tears from all eyes. . . . We hear the word and weep.
There shall be no more sea ! Oh ! Land of Heaven,
Midst all thy shimmering psalms, midst all thy glow
And glory of Godhead, shall we not repine ?
Shall we not strain our vision from high peaks
And crystal gorges, yearning to behold
The desolate seas of home, yearning to hear
The great wave-voices thunder once again ?

T. W.

Your story of the village clergyman who sent his congregation to sleep and then fell asleep himself comprehends the perfection of pulpit oratory. Once I enjoyed sermons, but at that time I had the privilege of hearing a really eloquent man, Henry Melville. He produced grand effects, to think of which thrills me even now to my fingers' ends.

At Cannes I confess to having liked the English service. The clergyman I heard had a very fine voice, and while he read whiffs, sweeter than incense from the orange gardens round about, came wandering up the aisles, and from the lower windows of the fabric (if I remember rightly) you caught glimpses of that divine violet sea beyond.

Did M. B. tell you of our shindy ? It was about " The Defence of Lucknow." In the first place, our letters crossed. M. B.'s is

to the effect that I should find it "tremendously fine." Mine informing her that I had read it, and did not care about it; that it gave me the effect of a clever newspaper correspondent's article put into verse; that I found the rhythm jolty, and that especially there seemed to me a total absence of inspiration in the poem. That was the first clash of arms. "Wait a while!" cried M. B.; "you will come round to my way of thinking presently—wait a while!" And I *did* wait; and, after reading the poem to myself again and again, till I was sufficiently interpenetrated with it, I read it aloud to my one critic, in whose judgment I have the greatest confidence. "That is very clever," quoth she, when I had done, and presently, "*but not to be compared with 'The Revenge.'*" Just my own impression—the cleverness of the poem is undeniable, but in "The Revenge" there is inspiration and a higher order of grandeur in all respects.

June 30, 1879.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

What came of it? We are dying to know, on our knees and dying—pray write.

Since I wrote last to you myself I have

read "The Lover's Tale." I read it on the lawn, with the four little dogs and the baby for chorus. M. B. declares it is lovely, and I suppose, from the limbo of a young man's midsummer madness, it must be lovely, but read it at my own sedate years, and from the standpoint of the real, I cannot say it had much effect on me. It might have been written by the Laureate's brother Frederick, and is interesting as showing how much alike the two lads were in mind and manner in that early time. To one of the two, however, was reserved progress and change and development, while the other has been restricted to a mere *statu quo*.

The poem shows all Frederick's tendency to vague, nebulous impersonations, to excess of description (often beautiful, I admit), and to occasional weakness of redundancy. Passing from the earlier work to the latter, you feel jerked abruptly out of one groove into another, out of one life and atmosphere into another—so much so, indeed, that I think it was a mistake to bring the two into contact. In the interval between the poems the writer had acquired back-bone, muscle, and a poetical entity.

No foot-rule would suffice to measure the

distance that separates "The Lover's Tale" from "The Lord of Burleigh," "Dora," and the "Morte d'Arthur." In the one he is a mere fantastic dreamer, in the other he sits clothed and in his right mind, and is a king of men.

Shelley (let me say *en passant*), with whom this earlier verse has a certain analogy, was never, in spite of his inspiration, a king of men. At best he was but a king of phantoms.

There is no sustenance in Shelley. There is but a wine of delight that leaves the reveller in it feverish and drunken.

I hope "The Quest" reached you.

July 28, 1879.

How is your garden? *We* are getting down from Ararat, and shall reach our natural level soon, I hope. When we arrive and alight, you shall hear more of us.

September 15, 1879.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

Just a line of apology for having left your two very welcome letters unanswered until now. The fact is, we have been vagabondising, and only returned home yesterday.

We have taken a scamper through Holland—seen Amsterdam and Rotterdam (the only bits of Venice within our reach)—and passed two days at Domburg, the Dutch *ultima Thule*, in the Dale of Walstaran, a most charming little place amongst the “Dunes” and oak woods. It was discovered, a few years ago, by a wandering artist, and will some day take rank as a *ville de bains*. Anything more primitive you cannot conceive; it has all the simpler virtues of the golden age—honesty, hospitality, kindness of character, and a local costume that would set you raving.

We arrived at Domburg in the evening, and, strolling up the village street, sat down for an instant on a bench in front of one of the bath-houses. Presently the door opened and a fair, fat little maid invited us to go in and take tea. On our declining this hospitable offer through discretion, the lady of the house came out herself, sat down on the bench beside us, and told us the story of her life, *entre chien et loup*.

No doors are locked at Domburg, night or day; you can go in anywhere, and all the cupboards are opened and the drawers pulled out to satisfy your curiosity. Let us meet

at Domburg some year when the world has been too much with us, early or late, and let us relive the golden age amongst that innocent and happy race. Does it not tempt you?

What a nice little article you have contributed to *Notes and Queries*! Could you not write a series of such? There is Rushton and the Triangular Lady, and the Mystical Lady with red gold hair (who invited *you* in to tea) to begin with.

I send the Quests—merely apologising for their condition. I fear all the *new* copies have gone their ways unless I light upon some in unexpected copies. Our awful move last March has made chaos of all my personal possessions.

September 19, 1879.

Have you read "A Foregone Conclusion" by Howell, an American? If not, get a Tauchnitz copy on this side the water, for travelling companion. It is a Venetian book, and seems to me to have a good deal of local colour in it. The Americans are looking up in original fiction. Witness the modern James, author of "The American in Europe," Daisy Miller, Roderick Hudson, etc. You

will find all these in the Tauchnitz set, which you can easily smuggle into England, if your conscience is not too scrupulous.

I have been hunting in all my corners and cupboards for copies of "The Quest," and find not one, except my own annotated copy. I have half a mind to reprint it and add the siftings of my former work. Severest siftings. Do you recommend this? M. B., to whom I communicated this idea, has sent me a list of what she thinks best in "The Burden of the Bell"; but her list is too long. I am a veritable Saturn with my own offspring, and may gobble every one of these eldest born up, if I am not restrained. Have you "The Burden" in your possession? Have you that last straw? or have you "Berries and Blossoms," or "Beads from a Rosary"? No, not the latter; I believe I have gobbled that up already. But if you have the above, will you—could you—would you . . .? Can you be a critic of the old sort—rigorous, implacable? That is the sort of collaborateurs I am in need of. Ah! forgive such an importunity on my part. It is too much, I know.

Ever, dear Lady Alwyne,

Yours very faithful and sincere.

December 20, 1879.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

Throw your letter into the fire! What an extraordinary and unimaginable supposition! A letter full of Venetian light and beauty—*or letter of letters*—that we read twice over, “séance tenanto,” and that we have kept precious to read again. No. Patience was not ever on a monument. Patience knew it could not expect letters, and that all would come in due time, and patience has had its reward.

I am glad you like Worcester. The little photo gives me a pleasant idea of it, but makes me hope that a high wind will blow down those two tall chimneys on the first occasion. I shall often see you walking on that terrace, and watching the “sawmons” leaping in the silver Severn.

It is one of my grievances that I have never caught a salmon, though it is true I share it with the father of anglers, Iz. Wa., just as I share with him many pleasant souvenirs of pastoral Lea side, and its loggerheaded chub. You have no idea how fond I am of the Lea and its memories, and how all the minute details of the time cling to me, such insignificant details most of

them! There is no river in the world I love so much as that old level-flowing, sedgy Lea. Shall I ever see it again, I wonder? And is it wise to "revisit Yarrow" when the eyes that beheld it of yore have grown dim and weary? I am sure if I were to go back to the place of my birth there would be tears in my eyes, and anguish in the tears.

But it is not so with you and Venice. It is all too recent, and of Venice, I prophesy, you have not yet seen your last, and that again and again you will glide across that Lombard plain into the silence and mystery of it.

I wish you would write a little book about Venice, a book of its inner life, and that would be redolent of its atmosphere and associations. There is no such book that I know (for Ruskin's is more and less than that), and no better hand to write it than your own.

When winter, the wolf, has done howling, and the Worcester meadows are yellow with daffodils, set aside a little corner on that terrace, and therein build up the Soul of Venice and its witchery for your friends, and make yourself famous. Is Gladstone sympathetic in Venice? I won't say

he is *præterea nihil*, but of *vox* he has given us enough and to spare of late. He gives me the idea of a man with a warp ; he seems to have set aside all measure and discretion. Are not all *reappearances* in public life, whether of actors or statesmen, failures and mistakes ?

We are settled in town, but sigh for Boitsfort every day of our lives. We feel cribbed and "scroudded" in our town quarters, and the town has been hideous since the great frost set in—foggy air, dirty snow, red noses, coughs, and sneezes. We ran down to the little country house last week, and it was lovely ; the trees pictures, the lawn an immaculate sheet of white—everything pure and bright and invigorating. Still, we are better off than the Parisians. Paris seems to have been virtually annihilated.

But oh, the misery everywhere ! It is heart-breaking. How is it that great public efforts of charity never really seem to reach the poor ? Go into any poor home and ask if relief has come to them, and it is always "No" and "No" ; and yet the papers are full of subscriptions, and the total goes on increasing and increasing. What becomes of it all ? How does it evaporate ?

October 4, 1880.

We have had a great, solemn celebration here, a national golden wedding, an exhibition, and an endless variety of jollities and festivities. Brussels, in fact, has been metamorphosed and glorified for the last three months. So far well; the cavalcades and patriotic fêtes, the art-shows and the fireworks, were all charming; but, alas! with them came the Philistines, an exceeding great army of Philistines, and really what to do with Philistines has become quite a modern social problem now that jawbones of asses have ceased to be a legal remedy. Great were our sufferings, complete was our extenuation and impoverishment.

• Pushed to extremes at last, we showed the white feather, and ran away. We left the enemy in possession of the place, and we scuttled off by a "side postern" to Dinant on the Meuse, where we set up our tents and found rest.

I think I have described Dinant to you on a former occasion, and if so you know that it is a land of lotus-eaters, "a land where all things always seem the same"; that in Dinant nobody grows old, nobody is born, nobody dies; that it is Dinant the Immut-

able. And, indeed, so I found it after I do not know how many years' absence. The landlord at the hotel was quite unchanged, so was the little brown man in the chemist's shop, so were the tarts (oh! the very same tarts!) on the very same pastry-cook's counter.

There was but one novelty in Dinant, *Robert Browning, jun.*, and he was a figure of fun, quite a droll little figure in knickerbockers, with short, fat legs, and a ruddy countenance, the last man in all creation I should have chosen for Elizabeth Browning's son. He was painting Dinant immutabilities, and it seems he passes much of his time there. I made his acquaintance, of course, and found him quite *comme il faut*; but he said little of his mother, of whom he can have but a faint recollection. He was very popular at the hotel, and seemed thoroughly good-natured, and quite at home. He told me he preferred the Walloons to the Flemings, and Dinant to Antwerp, where his studio is.

It is a pleasant place, straggling as it does in the sunshine by the river's brim, on and on into a golden distance. The Meuse sings to it by day, and the carillon by night rains down fairy music on its roofs; and all the

faces in it are brown and smiling, and all the little brown babes toddle about the doors and chirp. It gave us a brace of blessings—sweet air and repose, and in the meantime the fêtes came to an end, and the Philistines (Anathema Maranatha!) took their departure.

I have a great deal more to tell you, but have not left myself space. Besides, who knows what changes Worcester may have brought to pass? There are anxious feelings on this score in the hearts of M. B. and I.

Good-bye, dear Lady Alwyne. Pray remember us both to Lord Alwyne.

November 4, 1880.

DEAR LADY ALWYNE,

I am so sorry you should have attached any serious meaning to my light speech. It was really the very lightest of speech. M. B. said, one day, that she had not heard from you for some time, and that she missed your letters. That was *her* whole and sole share in it—and mine; you know right well I had no business to grumble otherwise than jestingly, being myself a defaulter. Will

you forgive me for my *mal adresse* in not wearing my cap and bells more visibly and audibly. That was the mistake.

Do you like the Tennyson-Turner sonnets? I like about a dozen of them. The book is too *fat* and too *flat*. A selection would have been a wiser course, in my opinion. M. B. says nothing about them, so I fancy she must be disappointed too. Posthumous publications almost always sin by excess of zeal and want of discretion. We are given not only the manuscript remains, but the contents of the waste-paper basket, into the bargain.

You shall know all about my sweethearts, the "Mouse" and "Poppie" clan. I told one of them the other day (that was Mouse) that too many sweethearts were worse than the treadmill; and charming was the reply vouchsafed me! Mouse and Poppie are my *saucy* sweethearts; but they must stand over for a time, as I wish to introduce you to a new sweetheart, in whom I hope you will be interested. About seven years ago a Mrs. Probyn and her two young daughters (May and Dora) came to Brussels and brought letters of introduction to us. The mother was an invalid; the two children

shy and reserved, almost to the Charlotte Brontë degree of shyness.

Poppie's story is adventurous. You know they went to Texas and bought a farm, and built a house. The farm was a failure; the house broke down, their fences were invaded, their horses stolen. Poppie's health failed, and the end was that they sold what was left of their property at half-price, and scuttled off to Chicago, where a second baby was born, and Poppie at death's door. Then they bought more horses, and, "would you believe it?" she says, "the nasty, unkind creatures all died!" At last, when they had only just money enough left to pay their fare, they returned to New York, and there suffered great straits. Poppie went into a store; Poppie's husband kept the books. Did they make two ends meet? Don't believe it!

Finally, they made a friend, who took a fancy to the two poor children, and found a better situation for "Charley" as secretary to some New York company. "And now," says Poppie, "we have taken a little flat, and are furnishing it by degrees—and I have a third baby—and dear old Charley is looking up in the world, and . . . there's my portrait,

that you may know your Poppie is not looking like a worn-out woman ! ”

I should think she wasn't ! My poor little flighty, foolish Poppie looks much more like an angel—an angel with a “ malin ” glance in her eye, savouring little of angeldom. Would you like to see her portrait ? I remember I sent you the one taken by the same photographer at New York, when she was on her way out to Texas ; but this is prettier.

I am preparing for the press a second edition of my “ Bibliotheca Piscatoria,” and your friend Mr. Denison has been very civil and serviceable to me in the matter. He has allowed Mr. Satchell to have access to his angling library, which has taken the shine out of mine (the retrospective shine), and consists, I am told, of nineteen hundred works. A good many of my old friends are amongst them. When you see Mr. Denison would you oblige by thanking him for his courtesy in my behalf ?

January 8, 1881.

I hesitate over Morris (who is Chaucerian) and Rossetti (who is really great); but I give up Swinburne. Swinburne is undoubtedly

the king of the intense school, and also the king of shame. Why does he not marry Ouida? That is my constant cry. They would make each other so intensely miserable; and how jolly it would be!

Ever, dear Lady Alwyne,

Yours most sincerely.

April 21, 1881.

I have had some correspondence with your nephew, who interests me; but we differ on some points. He defends Swinburne a little, and I attack him a great deal, and vehemently, but our discussions on that point have had this result—that I have studied the intense poets, which I had never done before, and that I can no longer condemn them wholesale and absolutely. They are mad as March hares in many of their moods; but there are poets amongst them, nevertheless. Payne, for instance, has a touch of genius, and O'Shaughnessy, and even Marzials, who is the maddest of them all. My opinion of Rossetti you know already. He is the head of the school, and worth fifty Swinburnes. Did Mr. Lowell, who has been with you, touch on this matter? He is not intense himself, I know.

The madness of Marzials induced me to write a little quiz, which I send you. Will you find it very profane? I hope not. You know the intense poets *are* profane, besides being improper; but my quiz avoids the latter rock, of course. I send you, too, an intensity that is not a quiz. Am I bitten? I don't think so; but I am amused certainly. If you cared to examine for yourself, you would find a very fair collection of gleanings from this school, called "Latter-day Lyrics," published by Chatto and Windus. And if you wished to appreciate Mr. Marzials's fine frenzies, his "Gallery of Pigeons" (Henry S. King & Co.) would enable you to do so. I commend in that case "Passionate Dowsabella," and the "Pigeons" themselves, to your notice.

September 15, 1881.

Oh, yes, our peace is made surely! But you did not think I had really any leaning to æsthetics, did you? All my leanings are the other way, as your nephew knows very well; but I felt curious about the movement and was interested in fathoming the depth of its absurdity, and I found, as you have done, that it has no other depth at all. As

æstheticism in poetry it is mere hollow sham, and yet outside its pretences, and perhaps in spite of them, I lit upon some very pretty verses in O'Shaughnessy's "Music and Moonlight," for instance, and in some of Marzials's saner songs—I think I could easily win you over to them, if I had a chance. I quite agree in your appreciation of Mr. Rennell Rodd's little volume; it has nothing tangible, and leaves no impression. Your account of the emendations suggested in his "so wildly and so well" made me laugh exorbitantly, when I believe even laughter was prohibited; indeed, your letter altogether amused me and charmed me. When shall I have another? The Worcester Festival is over—the guests are all gone (?). *When* shall I have another?

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